THE CHRIST OF OUR POETS

By
H. WALTER FEATHERSTUN, D.D.

"What think ye of Christ?"—JESUS

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To My Friend and Brother
REV. H. M. Du BOSE, D.D.
Whose Suggestion Gave Birth
to My Purpose to Write
These Studies

CONTENTS

THE CHRIST OF BROWNING

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"

—JOHN iii. 16

I

By "The Christ of Browning" let us not understand merely the poet's conception of the person and mission of the Christ, but his notion of Christ's teachings as well; indeed, of that whole grand system of which Christ is the center, as the hub is of the wheel. In a very essential sense Christ and Christianity are one.

A living writer[1] has recently said:

> If Tennyson reflected the scientific nineteenth century's doubt, and triumph in struggling out of it, Browning reflected the theological nineteenth century's faith, and as an exuberance of spiritual life. He incorporated into his metaphysical genius the psychology underlying the great literature of the Bible, and the newly forming literature of the Wesleyan movement.

This is not saying too much; and yet there is apparent throughout his works no effort to make public the sacred secrets of his spiritual life; but on the other hand, like the Christ, he would say to his children, creatures of his brain, "See thou tell no man." But spirituality, like "a city that is set on a hill, cannot be hid"; its very existence is self-assertive; it is light made to lighten the

[1] Rev. D. S. Hearon, D.D.

world, and when it fails to enlighten it ceases to exist. Perhaps Dr. Hearon only told the truth when he wrote:

> The uplift of religious-consciousness as reflected in English literature registers its highest reach in Robert Browning. His poetry reflects a higher, completer spirituality than is found elsewhere in our literature.

Browning's conception of God is that which he could have gotten only through the Christ. He thought of God as a Father; his gospel was, "God so loved the world." His Festus in "Paracelsus" says:

> God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.

This was Browning's very soul. In "Evelyn Hope" he sings:

> God above
> Is great to grant, as mighty to make.

In "Saul," one of his masterpieces, he puts these grand utterances into the mouth of young David:

> I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke:
> I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
> And pronounced on the rest of his handiwork—returned him again
> His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:
> I report as a man may of God's work—*all's love, yet all's law.*

He reaches a still higher tide of this lordly conception, and takes in a prophecy even of Calvary as an expression of the love that he sings:

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst Thou
—so wilt Thou!
So shall crown Thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—
And Thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in.

Addressing the king, the young minstrel prophesies:

O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

In "A Death in the Desert" he sings:

The love that tops the might, the Christ in God—
. . . . . .
Putting the question ever, Does God love?
And will ye hold that truth against the world?

He urges:

I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth or out of it.

In "An Epistle" he makes Karshish, an Arab physician, the supposed author of the "Epistle,"

who stoutly resists belief in the raising of Lazarus, finally break down and confess:

> The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
> So, *the All-Great were the All-Loving too—*
> So, through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying, O heart I made, a Heart beats here!
> . . . . . .
> Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou mayst love Me who have died for thee.

In "Fears and Scruples" he sings thus beautifully his high, true thought of God:

> Of old I used to love him,
> This same unseen friend, before I knew:
> Dream there was none like him, none above him—
> Wake to hope and trust my dream were true.
> Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
> Not his actions famous far and wide?
> Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
> Present, he would find me at his side
> . . . . . .
> Hush, I pray you!
> What if this friend happened to be—God?

That there should be coupled with such a conception of God, of "Christ in God" and "God in Christ," a strong, sweet faith as beautiful as it was buoyant, is but to be naturally looked for. His "Paracelsus" voices that faith:

> I go to prove my soul!
> I see my way as birds their trackless waste.

I shall arrive! What time, what circuit first,
I ask not: but unless God send his hail,
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird. In his good time.

In "Reverie" he sings the same strong faith:

I know there shall dawn a day—
Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth
That Power comes full in play?
. . . . . .
Somewhere, below, above,
Shall a day dawn—this I know—
When Power, which vainly strove
My weakness to o'erthrow,
Shall triumph. . . . .
I have faith such end shall be:
From the first Power was—I knew.
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for a closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

He does not leave us in doubt here just what he means by "Power":

Power is love—transports, transforms
Who aspires from worst to best.

This faith which he here sings is an optimism that inspires—a "faith that works":

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep

Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep.

In "Abt Vogler" his faith sings out more strongly, clearly, sweetly still:

To whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and Maker thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.
All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

In "Apparent Failure" he sings it again:

My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after Last returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once proved accursed.

The dying Paracelsus sings:

If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendor soon or late
Will pierce the gloom; I shall emerge one day.

That a faith like this had no fear of death is but a natural conclusion. Browning in "Prospice" sings his view of death—a very personal view it is, too:

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place.

. . . . . .

I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!

. . . . . .

No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
The heroes of old;
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again
And with—God—be the rest.

The catholicity of his faith is revealed in "Christmas Eve," where he tells us that on a

certain night before Christmas he went into a chapel where the service, crude and unrefined, offended his taste; but as the people were leaving the building he had a realistic vision of our Lord coming out with them and passing him by unnoticed. An unutterable terror came over him, and he cried:

> But not so, Lord! It cannot be
> That thou, indeed, art leaving me—
> Me, that have despised thy friends!
> Did my heart make no amends?

He then explains and confesses:

> I thought it best that thou, the Spirit,
> Be worshiped in spirit and in truth
> And in beauty as even *we* require it—
> Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
> I left but now, as scarcely fitted
> For thee: I knew not what I pitied.
> But all I felt there right or wrong,
> What is it to thee who curest sinning?
> Am I not weak as thou art strong?

The Lord turned and threw over him a pardoning, purifying glory; and thus he exchanged bigotry for catholicity. Who will suppose this to be a real experience of the poet's? Only he who knows nothing of Browning. It is his own quaint, poetical way of preaching against bigotry, which he, like his Lord, despised.

Dr. Hearon, already quoted, calls attention to

the fact that our poet was what they call in England "an evangelical":

> Browning reflects the processes of saving faith. Take the story of the conviction of the two lovers in "Pippa Passes." The lovers were murderers. Up to the moment at which the girl passes, and sings, they were unmolested in the joy which they had in each other. But their delight in each other, the Spirit, using the song of the passing girl, reverses in mutual revulsion.

His relation of the conversion of Paracelsus and Karshish is also quite evangelical in tone.

While not an interpreter of nature like Wordsworth, yet Browning was not insensible to its beauties; but nature's beauties all told him of God, and love, and the Christ; as an example:

> Wanting is—what?
> Summer redundant,
> Blueness abundant—
> Where is the spot?
> Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same
> Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
> What of the leafage, what of the flower?
> Roses embowering with naught they embower!
> Come then, complete incompletion, O Comer,
> Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer,
> Breathe but one breath,
> Rose-beauty above,
> And all that was death
> Grows life—grows love,
> Grows love!

As another example:

> Love greatens and glorifies
> Till God's aglow, to the loving eyes,
> In what was mere earth before.

We might wish that Browning's expression had been simpler—it would then have been even stronger and sweeter than it is; but no one can wish for him a better evidence of faith in God and the Christ.

THE MESSAGE OF "IN MEMORIAM"

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

—JOHN xi. 25, 26

II

In Memoriam A. H. H., obiit MDCCCXXXIII.

Such is the full title of Lord Tennyson's masterpiece. Nothing could be more unpretentious; and the poem itself wears the air of unstudied outbreathings of a heart bereaved, now telling its grief, now telling its love for the dead, now detailing events in the life that has passed, now relating something of that life's last days, and never essaying to teach or to reason or to moralize. Nevertheless, "In Memoriam" has for us all a beautiful message, strong and clear and life-uplifting. Its message, like that of "Locksley Hall," is one of faith in the Christ. In "Locksley Hall" the statements are suggested rather than made, and Christ is mentioned but not named; but the very opening words of "In Memoriam" are:

> Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
> Whom we, who have not seen thy face,
> By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
> Believing where we cannot prove,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
> Thou madest man, he knows not why;
> He thinks he was not made to die;
> And thou hast made him: thou art just.

The song of faith in "Locksley Hall" is rather a pæan of victory breaking out of the din and

roar of battle; but "In Memoriam" is itself a song of faith, clear-toned and melodious, stealing out from under cypresses and weeping willows, now all aquiver with the grief of a widowed spirit, now brightly striking a higher note, the hope of immortality, now singing strongly its virile faith in God. The very things we would expect to find in an "In Memoriam" are all here: the sense of loss, the grief, visions of the past and of the future, thoughts of heaven, consoling facts and considerations, and, greatest among them all, a strong, sure hope of immortality; and yet there is in it all not one trite phrase or word, not one conventional utterance or suggestion; but it is throughout pervaded with a most refreshing individuality or naturalness sincere and full of faith in God and his Christ.

He sings his grief:

> I sometimes hold it half a sin
> To put in words the grief I feel;

yet he must tell it—

> In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er
> Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
> But that large grief which these infold
> Is given in outline and no more.

He spurns the slavish, doltish comfort that sometimes comes to lower souls from the fact that "loss is common," and death the doom of all:

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.

He finds real consolation, however: he finds it in the deathless memory and fadeless love of the friend who has passed from his sight:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

He finds it in the hope of immortality, to him a fact rather than a hope, a present fact as real as any other and as deathless as God:

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live forevermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is—

What then were God to such as I?
'Twere hardly worth my while to choose
Of things all mortal, or to use
A little patience ere I die;

'Twere best at once to sink to peace,
Like birds the charming serpent draws,
To drop headforemost in the jaws
Of vacant darkness and to cease.

This fact of immortality was to him not merely a logical fact, but a real, living certainty: he imagines his dead friend coming to him, as of old—*if it were so,*

And I perceived no touch of change,
No hint of death in all his frame,
But found him all in all the same,
I should not feel it to be strange.

He tells an experience common with those of like heart and faith:

When in the down I sink my head,
Sleep, Death's twin brother, times my breath;
Sleep, Death's twin brother, knows not death,
Nor can I dream of thee as dead:

I walk as ere I walked forlorn,
When all our path was fresh with dew,
And all the bugle breezes blew
Reveille to the breaking morn.

He restates his faith in immortality, his creed of the dead, clearly and strongly, thus:

I wage not my feud with Death
For changes wrought on form and face;
No lower life that earth's embrace
May breed with him can fright my faith.

Eternal process moving on,
From state to state the spirit walks:
And these are but the shattered stalks
Or ruined chrysalis of one.

Nor blame I Death, because he bare
The use of virtue out of earth:
I know transplanted human worth
Will bloom to profit otherwhere.

What man of faith and thought before Tennyson could say that he was reckless of the changes

wrought by death "in form and face," and the work of decay and of the very worms, so thoughtful was he of the deathless spirit of his beloved dead? Who before ever spoke of "the article of death" as a bearing out of this world into another, "the use of virtue"?

Evidently the surest, strongest consolation that our singer has sung in this great song of faith is his personal, living faith in Christ, the "Strong Son of God, immortal Love," of his first stanza. Christ was real to him; hear him:

> Thou seemest human and divine,
> The highest, holiest manhood thou:
> Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours to make them thine.

The historic Christ and the living Christ were one to his thought and faith, the Christ who was just as human as he was divine:

> And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought.

The poet's thought of heaven is told in one strong, simple line:

> That friend of mine who lives in God.

Could anything be finer? Could any thought be loftier? Could any notion of heaven be truer? This is the normal result of a living faith in a liv-

ing Christ, with whom the soul is so thoroughly acquainted that communion with him is as real as the faith in him.

With such faith in the Christ, it is but natural that wild, rhapsodic bursts of optimism should break out of this song of sadness and ripple like the music nature makes on a May morning. That richest, strongest song of optimism ever sung, which begins,

> Ring out wild bells to the wild sky,

and which is too well known and too often quoted to be repeated here, is a part of "In Memoriam." The last stanza reaches this lordly climax:

> Ring in the valiant man and free,
> The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
> Ring out the darkness of the land,
> Ring in the Christ that is to be.

His optimism was not altogether a hope, dwelling in future tenses, but had about it the buoyancy of a vernal present:

> And all is well, tho' faith and form
> Be sundered in the night of fear.

Consonant with all of this is the beautiful prayer found in the introductory stanzas:

> Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell;
> That mind and soul according well,
> May make one music as before,
> But vaster.

That Tennyson's optimism carried him almost, if not quite, into universalism may be regretted; but this error is not so grave as is the God-dishonoring unfaith which would tell us that Christianity is all in vain, and that Christ's magnificent scheme to lift a fallen world, although so wisely laid and all baptized with his blood, is a failure, a fatal folly. We had rather hear him sing:

> Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
>
> That nothing walks with aimless feet;
> That no one life shall be destroyed
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> When God hath made the pile complete.

That these lines admit of an interpretation out of harmony with the teachings of the New Testament is beyond question; but the poet rather suggests than asserts the teaching which may be inferred from them; he pleads apologetically:

> So runs my dream; but what am I?
> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry.

He hints of a theological conflict within himself on the subject:

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the world's great altar stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

That Tennyson's "larger hope" finds no sanction in our Lord's teaching is very evident; but we will excuse the poet's errant thought, when we find his heart so true to the Christ.

"In Memoriam" was written in 1849, when the poet was barely forty years of age: forty years later he wrote what might be called his last song of faith, one of the sweetest lyrics ever written:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and
Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

We cannot imagine a more fitting song for the close of that rich, songful life of faith. It reminds us of that beautiful legend, he sang so sweetly in early life, of "The Dying Swan": only the real death-song of the poet is a hundred-fold sweeter than his dream of the mythical song of "The Dying Swan."

THE OPTIMISM OF "LOCKSLEY HALL"

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God" —Rom. viii. 28

III

REDUCED to its last analysis, optimism in this connection means nothing more than faith in Christ. More than anything else Christ is the REDEEMER OF THE WORLD: a failure to really and positively redeem the world from the ruin into which sin has hurled it would be a fatal failure, a negation of his Christhood. He so understood it, for when he announced the organization of the Church, the concrete expression of his movement, he declared, "The gates of Hades [destruction] shall not prevail against it"; and just before his crucifixion he said, "I have overcome the world." The imagery of the book of Revelation contains clear and strong predictions of that good time coming when Christ shall really have fully redeemed the world. If optimism means faith in Christ, pessimism means unfaith, only another name for infidelity.

Lord Tennyson, the son of a minister, and with a mother specially noted for her piety, grew up "strong in the faith" of the Christ. "Locksley Hall" reveals that faith. It was not unthinking faith, the kind which exists because of inheritance, or because some leader of one's life believes; but it was a virile faith, made strong by the struggles it has maintained. There are hints

of this struggle even in this song of faith: he sings of the evil, the persistent, apparently unconquerable evil, that obtrudes everywhere:

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth!
Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature's rule!
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straighten'd forehead of the fool!

He is even more explicit yet:

All things here are out of joint:
Science moves but slowly, slowly, creeping on from point to point,
Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion, creeping nigher,
Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly dying fire.

He speaks of the struggle through which his faith passed, and of the exuberant youth and vigor of that earlier faith:

O thou wondrous Mother-age!
Make me feel the wild pulsation that I felt before the strife,
When I heard my days before me, and the tumult of my life
Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years would yield
Eager-hearted as a boy.

He tells the optimism of that halcyon time "before the strife":

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails:
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunderstorm;
Till the war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

Then he tells of his optimism *after* "the strife," an optimism all-victorious in "the strife," and larger and stronger because of "the strife":

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

. . . . . .

Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward
let us range.
Let the great world spin forever down the ringing
grooves of change.
Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the
younger day:
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

. . . . . .

Oh, I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not
set.
Ancient founts of inspiration well thro' all my fancy
yet.

Tennyson wrote another "Locksley Hall," which he entitled "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After." In "Locksley Hall" the plot presents a young lover, whose suit has been rejected, and another, a mean, unworthy man, has been accepted because of his wealth and title; and who rails at his fate and raves over the injustice and meanness of society. In "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," the same man, now a grandfather, counsels and argues with a young grandson who has met a like rebuff. The two episodes are assumed to have occurred sixty years apart; hence the name of the later poem. It was really written some forty or fifty years after the other.

An old adage says, "Twice a boy, and once a man." Old age, like verdant youth, is peculiarly subject to the temptation that makes pessi-

mists of weak men. So in the later poem we find evidences of an old-age conflict with doubt and a final victory of faith. Again the poet comes face to face with the rampant evil in the world; he rails at current vices, the tendencies of modern literature especially:

Rip your brother's vices open, strip your own foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—naked—let them stare.
Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your sewer;
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue pure.
Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism—
Forward, forward, aye and backward, downward too into the abysm.

He storms at ecclesiastical abuses:

Love your enemy, bless your haters, said the Greatest of the great;
Christian love among the Churches look'd the twin of heathen hate.
From the golden alms of Blessing man has coined himself a curse.
Rome of Cæsar, Rome of Peter, which was crueler? which is worse?

He parades the political corruptions of the day, especially the excesses of democracy:

France has shown a light to all men, preached a Gospel, all men's good;

Celtic Demos rose a Demon, shriek'd and slaked the
light with blood.

Notwithstanding all this rampant evil half dominant, he does not lose faith:

After all the stormy changes shall we find a change-
less May?
After madness, after massacre, Jacobinism and Jac-
querie,
Some diviner force to guide us thro' the days I shall
not see?
When the schemes and all the systems, Kingdoms and
Republics fall,
Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and
each for all?
. . . . . .
All diseases quenched by Science, no man halt, or deaf
or blind,
Stronger ever born of weaker, lustier body, larger
mind?
Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single
tongue,
I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so
young?—
Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion
killed,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert
tilled,
Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she
smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles

His last note of faith is loftier and stronger, if

possible, than any other note of this twin song of hope and faith:

Far away beyond her myriad coming changes earth will be
Something other than the wildest modern guess of you and me.

Close kin to it is the closing exhortation:

Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine.
Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine.
Follow Light, and do the Right— . . . . .
. . . . . Love will conquer at the last.

THE REGENERATION OF EDYRN

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"

—JOHN iii. 3

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" —2 COR. v. 17

"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name" —JOHN i. 12

IV

Lord Tennyson, in his Arthurian epic entitled "Geraint and Enid," tells the story of Edyrn. He was a cousin of the beautiful young Enid, and a suitor for her hand; but was rejected because he was utterly unworthy. Love so spurned turned to hate, and all the demoniac villainy of his baser self was vented upon Enid and her parents. With bribes and misrepresentations he turned the vassals of Yniol, Enid's aged father, from him, seizing upon the estate by means of a fictitious claim, and thus he reduced the feudal lord from opulence to penury. Just in the darkest hour of their misfortune Geraint comes to the rescue, challenges the villainous Edyrn in a tournament, overthrows him, and spares his life only on condition that he restore to Yniol and his family their wrested fortune; and then woos and weds the beautiful Enid.

Edyrn, beaten, humiliated, checked in his mad career of villainy, comes to himself, goes to Arthur's court, repents, reforms thoroughly, and becomes one of Arthur's famed Knights of the Round Table. He afterwards "tells his experience" to Geraint and Enid:

> My lord Geraint, I greet you with all love—
>
> . . . . . .

Who love you, Prince, with something of the love
Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us.
For once, when I was up so high in pride
That I was halfway down the slope of Hell,
By overthrowing me you threw me higher.

This sounds not unlike the doctrine we hear nowadays from the popular evangelistic pulpit; and it is as philosophic as it is scriptural. All real upward movement in human life must begin in a humiliation. The Beatitudes, constituting the first paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount, give us the steps upward of every life that aspires toward God and heaven; and they begin with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Long before the coming of the Preacher on the Mount, an inspired bard had sung: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

To Enid, who unwittingly showed some trepidation in his presence, the reformed Edyrn said:

Fair and dear cousin, you that most had cause
To fear me, fear no longer; I am *changed*.

Here is where the poet puts the stress in his story; and here evangelical Christianity, following the New Testament, puts the stress: Christianity *changes* men. Peter, with his uncontrollable impulsiveness; Thomas, with his chronic infidelity; Paul, with his pharisaic intolerance; Zaccheus, with his disloyalty; the Samaritan woman,

with her unchastity; the malefactor on the cross, with all his crimes, were *changed* by the religion of Jesus. "Except a man be born *from above,* he cannot see the kingdom of heaven," is the solemn dictum of our Lord. His religion offers to *change* every sinner in the world.

The poet stresses the need of a change and the fact of that change by showing what Edyrn was before the change put into contrast with what he became by it. He makes the convert tell it to Enid:

> Yourself were the first blameless cause to make
> My nature's prideful sparkle in the blood
> Break into furious flame; being repulsed
> By Yniol and yourself, I schemed and wrought
> Until I overturned him; then set up
> My haughty jousts, and took a paramour;
> Did her mock honor as the fairest of the fair,
> And, toppling over all antagonism,
> So waxed in pride, that I believed myself
> Unconquerable, for I was well-nigh mad:
> And, but for my main purpose in these jousts,
> I should have slain your father, seized yourself.
> I lived in hope that some time you would come
> To these my lists with him whom best you loved;
> And there, poor cousin, with your meek blue eyes,
> The truest eyes that ever answered heaven,
> Behold me overturn and trample on him.
> Then, had you cried, or knelt or prayed to me,
> I should not less have killed him.

Human ingenuity could hardly have concocted

a more diabolical scheme of cruelty and crime. Part of his dark scheme carried. He tells it all:

> And you came—
> But once you came—and with your own true eyes
> Beheld the man you loved (I speak as one
> Speaks of a service done him) overthrow
> My proud self, and my purpose three years old,
> And set his foot upon me, and gave me life.
> THERE WAS I BROKEN DOWN; THERE WAS I SAVED.

King Arthur himself, having tested thoroughly the converted Edyrn, bears testimony to the thoroughness of his conversion:

> This work of his is great and wonderful.
> His very face with change of heart is changed.

This very language is often heard in the midglow of the modern revival.

> The world will not believe a man repents:
> And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
> Full seldom *does* a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
> Edyrn has done it.

The wise king shows his faith in the conversion by trusting fully the convert:

> I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,
> Not rashly, but have proved him every way
> One of our noblest, our most valorous,
> Sanest and most obedient.

This whole story reads as if its author were a disciple of General Booth, of the Salvation Army; or of Wesley, the founder of Methodism; or of Moody, the great evangelist, so lately deceased. But it must be remembered that Lord Tennyson was a member of the Church of England, and not known to have any sympathy with the evangelical notions and methods of Wesley, Booth, Moody, or any of the great revivalists of these later centuries; and furthermore that his "Idyls of the King," as he entitled his Arthurian epics, were but his own poetic versions of old myths handed down a thousand years or more. Where then did Tennyson, or the legends he voices, get the evangelical doctrine of regeneration so strongly and so clearly taught in the story of Edyrn? There is but one answer: just where Wesley and Booth and Moody and all of us get it—from the New Testament, where it is written down by the pen of inspiration from the lips of our Lord.

TENNYSON'S "HOLY GRAIL"

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"

—Matt. v. 8

"Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"

—Heb. xii. 14

V[1]

If "In Memoriam" must be classed as Lord Tennyson's masterpiece, it must be conceded, I think, that "The Holy Grail" is his most beautiful long poem. He who always sought the richest melody possible to rhyme and rhythm, and the most gorgeous drapery in which imagination could clothe its thought, reached the summit of his marvelous capacity in this, possibly the most beautiful epic ever written.

It retells the old mediæval legend of the search for the Holy Grail by King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. The Holy Grail was

> The cup from which our Lord
> Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
> Which, from the blessèd land of Aromat—
> After the day of darkness, when the dead
> Went wandering o'er Moriah—the good saint,
> Arimathean Joseph, journeying, brought
> To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
> Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
> And there awhile it abode; and if a man
> Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
> By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
> Grew to such evil that the holy cup
> Was caught away to heaven, and disappeared.

---

[1]This chapter first appeared as a communication to the *Epworth Era.*

For a long, long time no one had seen the Holy Grail, though very many with prayers and fastings had sought to see it. At length, half a thousand years having passed, "a holy maid," sister of Sir Percivale, a nun, whose "heart was pure as snow," got a vision of it, and, calling her brother, said:

> Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail;
> For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
> As of a silver horn from o'er the hills.
> . . . . . .
> Oh, never harp nor horn,
> Nor aught we blow with breath or touch with hand,
> Was like that music as it came; and then
> Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam,
> And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
> Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
> Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
> With rosy colors leaping on the wall;
> And then the music faded, and the Grail
> Passed and the beam decayed, and from the walls
> The rosy quiverings died into the night.

Sir Percivale told the story in Arthur's Hall, and every knight was fired with a purpose to catch at least a glimpse of the wonderful all-healing Holy Grail so long withheld, but at last returned. Each sought it in his own chosen way. Some rode one way, some another—all vowed to give one year to the quest.

Sir Percivale rode on for many a day, and saw

many things, but not the Holy Grail; had many promising visions, each fading and leaving him "alone, wearying and thirsting in a land of sand and thorns." When he set out on his quest there came to him a prophecy of failure. He tells it thus:

> Then every evil word I had spoken once,
> And every evil thought I had thought of old,
> And every evil deed I ever did,
> Awoke and cried, "This quest is not for thee!"

After various disappointing experiences, each winding up with him "alone, wearying and thirsting in a land of sand and thorns," he sought out "a holy hermit in a hermitage," and told his story, craving advice. The good man said:

> O son, thou hast not true humility,
> The highest virtue—mother of them all.
> . . . . . .
> Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself,
> As Galahad.

He learned the hermit's lesson, and saw at last the Holy Grail.

And who was Galahad? He is called the "Maiden Knight."

> "God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"
> Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight.

He was the purest knight in Arthur's court—both pure and beautiful. Arthur's prayer was answered. When the news of the Holy Grail's

reappearance was told at Camelot, Sir Galahad caught the nun's spirit and "believed in her belief," setting his heart, with a sure hope, on seeing the Holy Grail; and he saw it again and again. In the great hall at Camelot there stood

> A vacant chair,
> Fashioned by Merlin ere he passed away.
> . . . . . .
> And Merlin called it "The Siege Perilous"—
> Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,
> "No man could sit but he should lose himself."

Sir Galahad, having learned the real secret of salvation as revealed in the Gospels,

> Said, "If I lose myself I save myself."
> Then on a summer night it came to pass,
> While the great banquet lay along the hall,
> That Galahad sat down in Merlin's chair.
> And all at once, ...
> A beam of light seven times more clear than day;
> And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
> All covered with a luminous cloud.

None saw it save Sir Galahad. The others saw the cloud; but he saw the Grail. Of all the knights in Arthur's court only he, who had lost himself to save himself, was holy enough to see it. The legend stresses the fact that Arthur was not there. Sir Galahad had other visions of the Holy Grail, and he followed where the visions led him until at last "one crowned him king far in the spiritual city."

Sir Lancelot was the most famous knight in Arthur's court, and had been considered the strongest and bravest; but his heart had become very impure:

> The great and guilty love he bare the queen,
> In battle with the love he bare his lord,
> Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time.

He had come to know his weakness; and once he confessed it:

> Me you call great: . . . . .
> . . . but there is many a youth
> Now crescent, who will come to all I am
> And overcome it; and in me there dwells
> No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
> Of greatness to know well I am not great.

In his quest for the Grail he had tempestuous experiences. At last he was brought in penitence to the foot of the cross, where he found pardon; and then he, too, saw the Holy Grail. But the vision was not clear and full and rich like those which came to Sir Galahad.

Sir Gawain started on the quest strong in purpose and hope, but

> Found a silk pavilion in a field,
> And merry maidens in it;

and turned from his search, and never saw the Holy Grail at all. The race of Gawain is a populous one. Thousands of young people start out

so purposeful and hopeful and ardent in their seeking for the best things God has for them, and are soon turned aside by some little worldliness, and thus miss all their high aims in life.

Such is the legend as told by England's greatest poet; but the lesson he would teach is richer than the legend which bodies it, and more beautiful than the gorgeous poetry that tells it. It means that purity of heart is a necessity if we are to reach the ideal life possible to us and come into possession of the wonderful things God has for his children. It means also that sin—all sin, though it be but the idling of a Gawain "in a silk pavilion" with the innocent maidens; though it be but the merest worldliness, the most innocent omission of duty, of the slightest indifference—blinds our eyes to the beauties of heaven and deafens our ears to the music of God.

Mrs. Browning says:

> There's nothing small:
> No pebble at my feet but proves a world;
> No skylark but implies a cherub choir;
> No hum of lily-muffled bee but finds
> Some coupling music with the whirling stars.
> Earth is crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush afire with God;
> But only those who see take off their shoes:
> The rest sit around it and eat blackberries.

And only the pure in heart "see": the rest are so sordid that they can see nothing in nature ex-

cept it be something to eat or to drink, and so spirit-blind that they see nothing in grace whatever. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." One with greater claim to inspiration than Tennyson has said: "We speak the philosophy of God in a mystery, even the hidden philosophy, which God ordained before the world [began] to our glory; [and] which none of the princely thinkers of this world knew. . . . But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. . . . Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's philosophy teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. . . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Tennyson's dream of the Holy Grail and Paul's revelation tell the same lordly story. They mean that only the soul which has passed the regenerative transforming of the new birth, and felt the touch of a Pentecostal chrism, may think the towering thoughts of God, and fathom glorious mysteries unknown to common minds. They teach that a regenerated soul means a reinvigorated intellect as well as a purified heart, and that the

child of God must know more of God than any other, and learn more of the divine secrets, getting deeper in God's mysteries, and keeping more in touch with God and heaven. Only "the pure in heart" see God.

LOWELL'S "SIR LAUNFAL"

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"

MATT. xxv. 40

VI

The legend of the Holy Grail has been the theme and inspiration of more than one of our poets. Lowell, as well as Tennyson and Morris, sang the legend. Lowell says of his poem:

> The plot (if I may give that name to anything so slight) of the following poem is my own, and, to serve its purposes, I have enlarged the circle of competition in search of the miraculous cup in such a manner as to include not only other persons than the heroes of the Round Table, but also a period of time subsequent to the date of King Arthur's reign.

On "a day in June" Sir Launfal made preparations for a long, wide search:

> For to-morrow I go over land and sea
> In search for the Holy Grail.

As was the custom with the knights of that romantic era of chivalry, he had made a vow to seek the Grail:

> Shall never a bed for me be spread,
> Nor shall a pillow be under my head,
> Till I begin my vow to keep.
> Here on the rushes will I sleep,
> And perchance there may come a vision true
> Ere day create the world anew.

So he slept on the pile of straw that night in

his castle, intending to start on his long journey early next morning. But that night

Into his soul the vision flew.

He dreamed that, just as he had planned, he started with the morning on his tour of seeking; but

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,
He was 'ware of a leper crouched by the same,
Who begged with his hand and moaned as he sate;
And a loathing over Sir Launfal came—
. . . . . .
For this man, so foul and bent of stature,
Rasped harshly against his dainty nature,
And seemed the one blot on the summer morn—
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

He dreamed that he rode on and on and on, seeking for years and years, undergoing many hardships, toiling incessantly in his search, but finding no trace of the long-sought Holy Grail.

At last, when old and gray and worn with years of toilsome, fruitless search, he found himself again in a wild midwinter at his castle gate. The leper was there also,

Lank as the rain-bleached bone,
. . . . a thing as lone
And white as the ice-isles of northern seas
In the desolate horror of his disease.

The discipline of his suffering through those toilsome years had wrought a change in Sir

Launfal; he had become more Christlike, and when the leper said,

> For Christ's sweet sake I beg an alms,

he replied humbly:

> I behold in thee
> An image of Him who died on the tree;
> Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns—
> Thou also hast had the world's buffets and scorns—
> And to thy life were not denied
> The wounds in the hands and feet and side:
> Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;
> Behold, through him, I give to Thee!
> Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes
> And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he
> Remembered in what a haughtier guise
> He had flung an alms to leprosie,
> When he girt his young life up in gilded mail
> And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.
> The heart within him was ashes and dust;
> He parted in twain his single crust,
> He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
> And gave the leper to eat and drink:
> 'Twas a moldy crust of coarse brown bread,
> 'Twas water out of a wooden bowl—
> Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed,
> And 'twas red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The leper no longer crouched at his side,
> But stood before him glorified.

Sir Launfal recognized the very Christ indeed before him, and his whole soul went out to him in loving devotion. The Master said:

Lo, it is I, be not afraid!
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here—*this cup which thou*
Didst fill at the streamlet for Me but now;
This crust is My body broken for thee,
This water His blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need:
Not what we give, but what we share—
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me.

Sir Launfal awoke from his dream; he had dreamed it all out in the vision of one night—a psychological possibility—and the vision gave him a lesson he had never learned before:

The Grail in my castle here is found!
Hang my idle armor up on the wall,
Let it be the spider's banquet hall;
He must be fenced with stronger mail
Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.

Instead of going on his senseless search, he gave himself unstintedly to helping humanity about him.

The meanest serf on Sir Launfal's land
Had hall and bower at his command;

for Sir Launfal's castle was ever open to the poor and the needy.

The lesson of Lowell's song is easily read; and it is as sweet as it is true and strong.

MRS. BROWNING'S GOSPEL OF REFORM

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor" —Ps. xli. 1

VII

Christianity is essentially a gospel of reform. Its one business in the world is to reform its customs born of sin, and turn its trend of life from downward to upward. Very early in its history the coming of its apostles to a great heathen city was announced in these words: "They that have turned the world upside down have come hither also." It is a fact that every great social reform ever inaugurated found birth and impulse and guidance in Christianity. The slavery of womanhood and the oppression of childhood, so universal before Christianity came, and the inhumanity of the treatment met everywhere, even among the Jews, by the insane, the leprous, the blind, and the lame—not to mention a great host of other intolerable cruelties—speak "trumpet-tongued" of the need of the reforms Christianity has brought, and is still bringing.

Mrs. Browning sang this gospel of reform, which is the gospel of the Christ,

> To one clear harp in divers tones—

sang it so strongly that all the world has heard.

In one of her sonnets, entitled "Hiram Powers's Greek Slave," she sings a strong protest against that species of human slavery so long and so largely excused under the name of serfdom:

On the threshold stands
An alien Image with enshackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave: as if the artist meant her
. . . . . .
To so confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense.
Pierce to the center,
Art's fiery finger! and break up erelong
The serfdom of this world! Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty, against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs, but west—and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence.

A stronger protest against this and other crying cruelties is sung in her longer lyric, entitled "A Curse for a Nation":

I heard an angel speak last night,
And he said, "Write!
Write a nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea."

This curse was for America because of negro slavery. She demurred:

Not so, my lord!
If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother:
For I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood,
To brothers of mine across the sea.

The angel insists: she argues her demurrer:

Evermore
My heart is sore
For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:
For parked-up honors that gainsay
The right of way:
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:
For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits:
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:
For an oligarchic parliament,
And bribes well meant.
What curse to another land assign
When heavy-souled for the sins of mine?

She then urged that as she was woman, and

Had only known
How the heart melts and the tears run down,

she was incapable of writing a curse; but the angel turned back on her the argument she used:

Therefore shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Some women weep and curse, I say
(And no one marvels) night and day,
And thou shalt take their part to-night:
Weep and write.

There is no defense to be made for negro slavery; but it was remarkable wisdom in this great Christian woman to face the blind prejudices and unreasoning partisanism of her time, and

recognize the truth that there prevailed a "white slavery" as reprehensible as negro slavery, and far worse in its tendencies, and that there were other great evils that cried to Heaven for reform.

She revoices part of this protest in "The Cry of the Human":

> The plague of gold strides far and near,
> And deep and strong it enters:
> This purple chimar which we wear
> Makes madder than the Centaur's.
> Our thoughts grow blank, our words grow strange:
> We cheer the pale gold-diggers—
> Each soul is worth so much on change,
> And marked like sheep with figures.
> Be pitiful, O God!
>
> The curse of gold upon the land,
> The lack of bread enforces—
> The rail-cars snort from strand to strand,
> Like more of Death's White Horses:
> The rich preach *rights* and future days,
> And hear no angel scoffing:
> The poor die mute—with starving gaze
> On corn-ships in the offing.
> Be pitiful, O God!

No protest that she ever uttered was so deep and earnest and strong as was her protest against the oppression of childhood. Her "Cry of the Children" has been heard all around the world wherever the English tongue is spoken; and it has touched the world's heart profoundly, inspir-

ing reform and molding legislation. Was there ever sung a plea more pathetic than this?

Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west;
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

She probed fearlessly to the shameful cause of "The Cry," a condition that had existed from time immemorial and to a fearful extent in England, and that has existed shamefully in America until a higher Christianity, heeding this "Cry of the Children," has compelled legislation abolishing it:

"Oh," say the children, "we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring

Through the coal-dark, underground;
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories round and round."

As she sings on, the picture deepens, the pathos grows, the horror of the condition becomes more and more appalling:

Still all day the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

She pleads with intense pathos:

Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!

She represents these children being told of God and replying:

Who is God that he should hear us
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?

They are urged to pray, and they answer:

Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,
"Our Father," looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words except "Our Father,"
And we think that in some pause of angel's song
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather
And hold both in his right hand which is strong.

She closes with these strong, fearful lines:

How long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart—
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.

Mrs. Browning wrote also "A Song for the Ragged Schools of London," in which she pleads again for the children:

Children small,
Spilt like blots about the city,
Quay and street and palace-wall—
. . . . . .
Ragged children with bare feet,
Whom the angels in bright raiment
Know the names of.

She pleads earnestly, eloquently, sweetly:

O my sisters! children small
Blue-eyed, wailing through the city—
Our own babes cry in them all:
Let us take them into pity!

When the Master sits as Judge, and we all come to his judgment seat, he will say to this gifted singer of England and Italy, this Christly lover of the children: "Inasmuch as *you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.*"

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE" TRANSFIGURED

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"

—MATT. v. 7

VIII

THAT there was an old English play, very inferior, which Shakespeare transformed and thus made his *Merchant of Venice,* has been clearly shown by Dr. Edward Dowden, of Dublin University. The old play was a product of the Dark Ages, when Christianity, half robbed of its Bible, was half pagan, and when literature was lifeless and tame; hence it was crude and worthless until Shakespeare, in the large light and liberty of the Elizabethan era of gospel emancipation, transformed it into the strong, virile, magnificent work of art known as *The Merchant of Venice.* The real difference, therefore, between the old play and the modern is a difference wrought by the religion of the New Testament: hence the work of art we know and admire is but *The Merchant of Venice* transfigured by the gospel of Christ.

Antonio, whose occupation gives name to the play, is a Christian. His character is one which we never weary of contemplating," says Dr. Henry N. Hudson, who adds: "The only blemish we perceive in him is his treatment of Shylock, . . . much more the fault of the times than of the man." He is a real Christian, not merely in the sense distinguishing him from a Jew or a Mo-

hammedan, but one that can say, "I hold the world but as the world," indorsing Gratiano's statement that

> They lose it that do buy it with much care—

an echo of our Lord's words, "Be not anxious for your life" (Matt. vi. 25). When Shylock's knife gleams thirsty for his heart's blood in forfeit of his bond, he can say:

> *I am armed and well prepared.*
> Give me your hand, Bassanio: fare you well!
> Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;
> . . . . . .
> Repent not you that you shall lose your friend,
> And he repents not that he pays your debt;
> For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,
> I'll pay it instantly with all my heart.

When the tide unexpectedly turns and the court decrees that half of Shylock's wealth is by law Antonio's, he has the grace to decline it, and the wisdom and justice to direct it to Lorenzo and Jessica, Shylock's son-in-law and daughter, whom the Jew would disinherit, accepting only a temporary use or trusteeship of it for the young people, and that only on condition that the court return to Shylock the other half forfeited to the state. Thus is indicated a Christlike absence of resentment, and a sweet fulfillment of that high law of the Christ which says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them

that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."

In Portia, who is more the heroine than Antonio is the hero of the story, and who is the author's one great female character, Shakespeare got far ahead, not only of the age in which he lived, an age shadowed by mediæval ignorance and degeneracy, but of this age also, the brightest era of human history. His Portia is a new woman in the highest, truest, best sense, a woman idealized nowhere else save in the Bible, and possible under no social system that is not completely saturated with Christianity. Dr. Hudson thus characterizes her: "Eminently practical in her tastes and turn of mind, full of native home-bred sense and virtue, uniting therewith something of the ripeness and dignity of the sage, . . . as intelligent as the strongest, at the same time as feminine as the weakest, of her sex: she talks like a poet and a philosopher, yet, strange to say, *she talks for all the world just like a woman.*" Mrs. Jameson thus writes of her, having studied her more thoroughly, perhaps, than any one else who has attempted to interpret Shakespeare:

She is full of penetrative wisdom, and genuine tenderness, and lively wit; but as she has never known want, or grief, or fear, or disappointment, her wisdom is without a touch of the somber or the sad; her affections are all mixed up with faith, hope, and joy; and her wit has not a particle of malevolence or caustic-

ity. . . . The sudden plan which she forms for the release of her husband's friend, her disguise, and her deportment as the young and learned doctor, would appear forced and improbable in any other woman, but in Portia are the simple and natural result of her character. The quickness with which she perceives the legal advantage which may be taken of the circumstances; the journey to consult her learned cousin, the doctor, Bellario; the spirit of adventure with which she engages in the masquerading; and the decision, firmness, and intelligence with which she executes her generous purpose—are all in perfect keeping, and nothing appears forced: nothing is introduced merely for theatrical effect. But all the finest parts of Portia's character are brought to bear in the trial scene. . . . Her intellectual powers, her elevated sense of religion, her high, honorable principles, her best feelings as a woman, are all displayed. . . . A prominent feature in Portia's character is that confiding, buoyant spirit which mingles with all her thoughts and affections. . . . Portia's strength of intellect takes a natural tinge from the flush and bloom of her young and prosperous existence, and from her fervid imagination. In the casket scene she fears, indeed, the issue of the trial on which more than her life is hazarded; but while she trembles, her hope is stronger than her fear. While Bassanio is contemplating the caskets, she suffers herself to dwell for one moment on the possibility of disappointment and misery. . . . Then immediately follows that revolution of feeling so beautifully characteristic of the hopeful, trusting, mounting spirit of this noble creature.

Portia's confidential estimates of some of her suitors, spoken privately to Nerissa, are too re-

freshing to be overlooked, especially as they indicate that her idea of real manhood is that told in the eighth Psalm, and portrayed in the New Testament. Of Monsieur Le Bon, the French lord, she says: "God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man." Of "the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew," she says: "When he is best, he is a little worse than a man; and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast."

Her plea with the Jew in the trial scene is beyond question the finest piece of the play, and is saturated with the teachings of the Christ:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown;
> His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
> But mercy is above this scepter'd sway;
> It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself;
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
> That, in the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.

"The lyrical boy-and-girl love of Lorenzo and Jessica" is as beautiful as a May morning, and as pure and sweet as the dew on roses. There is a beautiful philosophy as well as brilliant poetry and thrilling faith in his love-sick warblings, as Lorenzo seats Jessica on a moonlit bank, and says:

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

The following may not claim inspiration from any definite utterance in the New Testament, but finds abundant confirmation in the place ordained for music in our religion, specially indicated by the angelic choirs and their singing heard throughout the Book of Revelation:

Jessica. I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
Lorenzo. The reason is, your spirits are attentive:
For do but note a wild and wanton herd
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,
Which is the hot condition of their blood;
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze

By the sweet power of music: therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods;
Since naught so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dark as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted.

The following reminds us of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness and Sermon on the Mount:

The Devil can cite scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart:
Oh, what a godly outside falsehood hath!

The Merchant of Venice may be described by declaring it a most artistic compound of mediæval folklore and legend, history, common sense, and poetry, all thoroughly saturated with the spirit of the gospel, making of it one of the most magnificent productions of human genius.

THE GOSPEL IN "LALLA ROOKH"

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" —Ps. li. 17

IX

Of the four story-songs, or light epics, which make up Moore's "Lalla Rookh," the shortest and brightest is "Paradise and the Peri." Though a sort of fairy tale with a mythological setting, yet it is instinct with the spirit of the gospel.

The Peri, in Persian mythology, was one of a race of fallen angels seeking and expecting restoration to their lost paradise.

> One morn a Peri at the gate
> Of Eden stood disconsolate;
> And as she listened to the Springs
> Of Life within, like music flowing,
> And caught the light upon her wings
> Through the half-open portal glowing,
> She wept to think her recreant race
> Should e'er have lost that glorious place.

Her longing for the lost Eden grew intenser as she lingered. She soliloquizes:

> Go, wing thy flight from star to star,
> From world to luminous world, as far
> As the universe spreads its flaming wall;
> Take all the pleasures of all the spheres,
> And multiply each through endless years—
> One minute of heaven is worth them all.

The warder at the gate saw and heard her and was touched:

"Nymph of a fair but erring line!"
Gently he said, "one hope is thine:
'Tis written in the book of fate,
The Peri yet may be forgiven
Who brings to this Eternal Gate
The gift that is most dear to Heaven."

She was delighted at the bare possibility of earning entrance, and sped away to begin her search:

Down the blue vault the Peri flies,
And, lighted earthward by a glance
That broke just then from morning's eyes,
Hung hovering o'er our world's expanse,

wondering just where to begin her search. She knew the wealth

Of every urn
In which unnumbered rubies burn.

She knew also

Where the Isles of Perfume are
Many a fathom down in the sea
To the south of sun-bright Araby.

As she pondered the problem she flew aimlessly along:

While thus she mused her pinions fanned
The air of that sweet Indian land,
Whose air is balm, whose ocean spreads
O'er coral rocks and amber beds.

. . . . . .

The smell of death
Came reeking from *those* spicy bowers,

And man, the sacrifice of man,
Mingled his taint with every breath
Upwafted from the innocent flowers.

Mahmood of Gazna, the blood-thirsty conqueror of India, was in the midst of his awful work. The Peri saw a youth dying rather than to become traitor to his bleeding country; she gathered up the last drop of his life's blood and flew away with it, singing:

Oh! if there be on this earthly sphere,
A boon, an offering that Heaven holds dear,
'Tis the last libation Liberty draws
From the heart that bleeds and breaks in her cause.

She bore it to heaven's gate, but it did not avail. She was undaunted, however, and flew away to continue her search.

On the banks of the Nile she found a lovely youth dying of an awful pestilence, and his fair young bride ministering to him and dying herself in the midst of her ministering. Such beautiful love and self-sacrificing devotion seemed to the Peri costlier than anything she had ever known; so she carried to the closed gate of heaven the dying sigh of the young wife. But the charm failed, and the warder said:

True was the maiden—and her story,
Written in light o'er Allah's head,
By seraph eyes shall long be read.
But, Peri, see—the crystal bar
Of Eden moves not—holier far

Than even this sigh the boon must be
That opes the gates of Heaven for thee.

Then to "Syria's land of roses" the still undaunted Peri bent her flight and search,

If haply there may lie concealed
Beneath those chambers of the sun
Some amulet of gems annealed
In upper fires, some tablet sealed
With the great name of Solomon,
Which, spelled by her illumined eyes,
May teach her where, beneath the moon
In earth or ocean, lies the boon

she was seeking. At length one afternoon,

When o'er the vale of Baalbec winging
Slowly, she saw a child at play,
Among the rosy wild flowers singing,
As rosy and as wild as they.

While interestedly watching the boy,

She saw a wearied man dismount
From his hot steed.

With her more than human eyes the Peri read from the man's black heart the long, dark record of his fearfully wicked life—

Dark tales of many a ruthless deed:
The ruined maid, the shrine profaned,
Oaths broken, and the threshold stained
With blood of guests.

Just then "the vesper call to prayer" was heard.

The boy then started from the bed
Of flowers where he had laid his head,
And down upon the fragrant sod
Knelt with his forehead to the south,
Lisping the eternal name of God
From purity's own cherub mouth,
And looking, while his hands and eyes
Were lifted to the glowing skies,
Like a stray babe of Paradise
Just lighted on the flowery plain,
And seeking for its home again.

The man of sin saw the child, and was touched profoundly:

Memory ran
O'er many a year of guilt and strife,
Flew o'er the dark flood of his life,

back to the long-dead beautiful past when *he* was a pure boy. He thought of what he once was, and then of what he had become.

He hung his head—each noble aim
And hope and feeling which had slept
From boyhood's hour that instant came
Fresh o'er him, and he wept—he wept.
Blest tears of soulfelt penitence,
In whose benign, redeeming flow
Is felt the first, the only sense
Of guiltless joy that guilt can know.

The Peri caught the tear of penitence shed by this man of sin, and bore it hopefully to the long-closed gate of Eden. The charm prevailed, the gate flew open, and she passed through, shouting,

> Joy, joy forever! my task is done—
> The gates are passed and Heaven is won.

Not the patriotism that would freely give life itself to save one's native land—and God loves patriotism; not the richest, purest love that ever nestled in a human heart or expressed itself in sublime self-sacrifice—and the very genius of our religion is love; but true, heartfelt contrition over sin is

> The gift that is most dear to Heaven.

So runs the poet's gorgeous song; and the sweet singer of Israel, so long ago, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of inspiration, sang, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise"; and our Lord uttered his sweetest parable to prove and illustrate the truth "that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." It is the gladdest note of the gospel; for we are all by nature sinners, and are most blessed in having a heavenly Father and a redeeming Christ so ready to help and save whenever we turn penitently seeking salvation. The poet's thought here is as true as his telling it is beautiful; and the truth he illustrates is as sweet as the almost matchless music of his faultless rhyme and rhythm.

MOORE'S
SONG OF SIN

"To be carnally minded is death. . . . Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" —ROM. viii. 6, 7

X

One of the gorgeous oriental songs that make up Moore's "Lalla Rookh" is entitled "The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan":

> In that delightful Province of the Sun,
> The first of Persian lands he shines upon,
> Where, all the loveliest children of his beam,
> Flowerets and fruits blush over every stream,
> And fairest of all streams, the Murga roves
> Among Meron's bright palaces and groves—
> There, on that throne to which the blind belief
> Of millions raised him, sat the Prophet-chief,
> The Great Mokanna.

The features of this gifted, unscrupulous man were so utterly revolting, the result of a congenital deformity, that he was compelled to conceal them. He made this necessity the occasion of a fraud:

> O'er his features hung
> The Veil, the Silver Veil, which he had flung
> In mercy there, to hide from mortal sight
> His dazzling brow, till man could bear its light.
> For far less luminous—his votaries said—
> Were even the gleams miraculously shed
> O'er *Moses' face*, when down the Mount he trod,
> All glowing from the presence of his God.

Morbidly mortified over his revolting misfortune, he had become a villainous misanthrope. He spent his entire life, and used all of his su-

perior talents, in perpetuating this gigantic deception; luring the noblest youths of the land into his ranks only to be slaughtered in his insane expeditions for conquest; compelling, by the force of superstitious fear, the loveliest maidens to enter his harem only to die broken-hearted over blighted lives; conquering cities that dared to resist his oppressive aggressions only to put even the defenseless women and children to the sword —thus gloating with demoniac delight over the sufferings of his victims. The poet pictures the wretch soliloquizing thus:

"Yes, ye vile race, for hell's amusement given,
Too mean for earth, yet claiming kin with heaven,
. . . . . .
Soon shall I plant this foot upon the neck
Of your foul race, and without fear or check,
Luxuriating in hate, avenge my shame,
My deepfelt, long nurst loathing of man's name:
. . . . . .
I'll sweep my darkening, desolating way,
Weak man my instrument, cursed man my prey.
. . . . . .
How shall I laugh, when trumpeted along
In lying speech and still more lying song!"

Among the many beautiful maidens lured into his harem was the lovely Zelica, whose lover, the brave, strong young warrior Azim, was represented to her as dead. In the wild delirium of her grief, she had been induced to believe that by

entering the harem of "the divine Mokanna" she would fit herself for paradise and insure meeting with Azim there.

These were the wildering dreams, whose curst deceit
Had chained her soul beneath the tempter's feet,
And made her think even damning falsehood sweet.

He had bound her to him with a fearful oath over a goblet of blood in a charnel house. Her superstition, or her semi-insanity, her grief, and her helplessness made the awful oath a bond she could not break; and when she discovered that her Azim was not dead, and that Mokanna was only a horrible fraud, she clung to him hopelessly, helplessly, insanely. When "The Veiled Prophet" found that Zelica had discovered that he was an impostor, he threw off, in her presence, all semblance:

"Yes, my sworn bride, let others seek in bowers
Their bridal place—the charnel vault was ours!
Instead of scents and balms, for thee and me
Rose the rich steams of sweet mortality—
Gay, flickering death-lights shone while we were wed,
And for our guests a row of goodly dead.

. . . . . .

One moment more—from what this night hath passed,
I see thou knowest me, knowest me well at last:

. . . . . .

And now thou seest my soul's *angelic* hue,
'Tis time these features were uncurtained too.

. . . . . .

Turn and look—then wonder, if thou wilt,
That I should hate, should take revenge, by guilt,
Upon the hand whose mischief or whose mirth
Sent me thus maimed and monstrous upon earth:

. . . . . .

Here—judge if hell, with all its powers to damn,
Can add one curse to the foul thing I am!"
He raised his veil—the maid turned slowly round,
Look'd at him—shrieked—and sank upon the ground.

This fearful monster was soon defeated in battle, and ended his wretched life by an awful suicide.

The literature of the world does not contain the portraiture of a more repulsive character, nor a deeper, darker, more degrading delusion, than does this *song of sin,* "The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan"; and, whether the author so intended it or not, nothing that was ever told more truly and strikingly illustrates "the carnal mind" of which Paul writes, "the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually." [1] Behind a veil of superficial respectability, which apes the airs of purity and nobility, there hides, like the malformed face and black heart of the

[1] Article VII. of our Church. See Discipline, paragraph 7.

"Veiled Prophet," all unsuspected by the unthinking throng, "the carnal mind." Even those whose better judgment compels them to confess the existence of this "corruption of the nature" can hardly be brought to see how foul and debasing it is—the monster is veiled. We are inclined to half believe that the monster hidden there is not much of a monster after all—though a "carnal mind," not very carnal; the monster is veiled —a veritable Mokanna.

The saddest feature of this widespread, sad delusion is, that the victims themselves, the very tools of the "Veiled Prophet," are basely deceived. They think and speak of sins as "little sins," and freely confess them under euphemistic pet names, making light of any effort to consider them as serious, never dreaming at all that they are but the normal outcroppings of a Mokanna with the ugly name of "carnal mind" and the repulsive characterization of "the corruption of the nature."

Moore, in this song of sin, has painted sin very faithfully; but there can be no objection to his realism, because it is a realism faithfully revolting, uncondoned, and naturally meeting its meed of retribution. The lesson he teaches is a very righteous one, tending to make sin appear more sinful.

MOORE'S
LYRICS OF FAITH

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things"

—Ps. xcviii. 1

XI

THOMAS MOORE, the Irish Roman Catholic, "the little perfumed Adonis," who wrote verse which Jeffreys, of the *Edinburgh Review,* pronounced "licentious," who challenged Jeffreys and Byron to fight duels, and who satirized President Jefferson because he failed to give the little poet the attention he claimed, nevertheless wrote some sacred lyrics so strong with thought, so warm with spiritual life, and so rich in melody that we sing some of them yet in all of our churches. Moore might be named "The Lyrist of the English Tongue." He wrote national lyrics, love lyrics, and drinking songs—he translated "The Odes of Anacreon"; no poet was ever more truly *a singer;* no singer ever sang more sweetly. This singer, who often sang so wantonly, sang also very truly and sweetly of faith in God. How could this be? The true poet is the historian of the human heart, recording and interpreting its feelings; as Bailey, in his "Festus," says:

> Poets are all who love, who feel great truths,
> And tell them; and the truth of truths is love.

In a very essential sense, poets are inspired. There must be an inspiration of great thought-

feeling, or there can be no real poetry. The author of "Festus" says again:

> Poetry is itself a thing of God;
> He made his prophets poets, and the more
> We feel of poesie do we become
> Like God.

And Browning confirms the utterance:

> God is the *perfect poet*
> Who in creation acts his own conceptions.

All of this means that God, who sometimes compels the wrath of man to praise him, uses the true poet as the interpreter of human hearts, the mouthpiece of great truths, and the inspirer of noble aspirations. He sings because he is inspired to sing, and sometimes his song leads others to heights himself has never reached. This, evidently, is true of the gifted Irish poet, Thomas Moore. He sings beautifully of God:

> Thou art, O God, the life and light
> Of all this wondrous world we see;
> Its glow by day, its smile by night,
> Are but reflections caught from thee:
> Where'er we turn thy glories shine,
> And all things fair and bright are thine.

He thought of God, however, more as a great victorious Warrior and Conqueror than as a Father:

> Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea!
> Jehovah has triumphed—his people are free.

. . . . . .

Praise to the Conqueror, praise to the Lord,
His word was our arrow, his breath was our sword.

He seems to long for a God who is gentle and fatherly, and prays that God will be gentle with him:

Come not, O Lord, in the dread robe of splendor
Thou worest on the Mount, in the day of thine ire!
Come veiled in those shadows, deep, awful, but tender,
Which mercy flings over thy features of fire!

. . . . . .

So, when the dread clouds of anger infold thee,
From us, in thy mercy, the dark side remove;
While shrouded in terrors the guilty behold thee,
Oh, turn upon us the mild light of thy love!

His thought runs to the sterner notion of God while pleading for the tenderer. Of his thirty-two lyrics classified as sacred songs, at least five are devoted to this notion of God. It is but the natural outcome of the semi-mediæval Romanism under whose shadows he was born and reared. A religion which gives to the Christ hardly more consideration and worship than to Mary, and whose theology has in it nearly as much Greek philosophy and paganism as New Testament teaching, could hardly be expected to yield any notion of God other than this stern, cold semi-pagan conception which pervades the sacred lyrics of Tom Moore.

All of this does not mean that in his thought religion was comfortless; by no means. He sang that lovely hymn so popular wherever the English tongue is spoken. It is in all of our hymnals; we all sing it, but not just as he wrote it. He wrote it thus:

Come, ye disconsolate, where'er you languish;
Come, at the shrine of God fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish—
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.

Joy of the desolate, light of the straying,
Hope, when all others die, fadeless and pure,
Here speaks the Comforter, in God's name, saying,
"Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot cure."

Go, ask the infidel what boon he brings us,
What charm for aching hearts he can reveal;
Sweet as the heavenly promise Hope sings us—
"Earth has no sorrow that God cannot heal."

These stanzas are very beautiful, very tender, very true as an expression of the faith and hope of hearts born of God. Yet if Whittier or Tennyson or Browning had written them, the last line of each stanza would have read somewhat like this:

Earth has no sorrow that *Christ* cannot cure.

Of the thirty-two sacred songs, but one seems to recognize the Christ at all, and in this he is not named; but the conception is so tender and so

true to the Christ idea that we inadvertently think of the "Thou" and the "Thee" of the song as Christ; and yet Moore places before it as a text Psalm cxlvii. 3, instead of something from the words of the Christ. The song, however, is intensely beautiful, possibly the best thing Moore ever wrote, and rarely has it been excelled by any poet:

O Thou who driest the mourner's tear,
How dark this world would be,
If, when deceived and wounded here,
We could not fly to Thee!

The friends who in our sunshine live,
When winter comes are flown;
And he who has but tears to give,
Must weep those tears alone.

But Thou wilt heal that broken heart,
Which, like the plants that throw
Their fragrance from the wounded part,
Breathes sweetness out of woe.

When joy no longer soothes or cheers,
And e'en the hope that threw
A moment's sparkle o'er our tears
Is dimmed and vanished too,

Oh! who could bear life's stormy doom,
Did not thy wing of love
Come brightly wafting through the gloom
Our peace-branch from above?

Then sorrow, touched by Thee, grows bright
With more than rapture's ray,

As darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw by day.

Like all whose faith is weak and whose visions of religion's realities are dim, his religion was more a matter of the future tense than of the present. He uses the word "Comforter" in "Come, ye disconsolate"; but there is no reason to believe that he intended to allude most remotely to the Holy Ghost, so named by our Lord in John xiv. 16, 26. He evidently never dreamed of the "Witness of the Spirit," nor of the "Guidance of the Holy Ghost," as taught by the evangelical Churches of to-day. With little or no conception of a present-tense salvation, a heaven-on-earth religion, he naturally turned to the future, and the far-off future; he sang sweetly and rapturously of heaven:

This world is all a fleeting show
For man's illusion given;
The smiles of joy, the tears of woe
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow—
There's nothing true but Heaven.

Taken in its bald literalness, as a matter of course, this stanza is utterly false. This world is not a fleeting show, nor was it given for man's illusion. Smiles and tears are not all deceitful, and there are other things than heaven that are true. We must not take Moore's words here too literally; but making due allowance for poet-

ical hyperbole, we get a beautiful truth strongly and beautifully told. The next stanza is a little less extreme:

> And false the light on glory's plume
> As fading hues of even;
> And Love, and Hope, and Beauty's bloom
> Are blossoms gathered for the tomb—
> There's nothing bright but Heaven.

Understanding, as he intended we should, that the terms *glory, love, hope,* and *beauty* refer only to temporal conditions, the stanza is as true as it is musical. The next is utterly unobjectionable; its sense is plain, its statement strong and true, its spirit the best:

> Poor wanderers of a stormy day,
> From wave to wave we are driven;
> And fancy's flash and reason's ray
> Serve but to light the troubled way—
> There's nothing calm but Heaven.

He sang a yet truer, sweeter thought of heaven:

> Weep not for those whom the veil of the tomb
> In life's happy morning hath hid from our eyes,
> Ere sin threw a blight o'er the spirit's young bloom,
> Or earth had profaned what was born for the skies.
>
> Death chill'd the fair fountain, ere sorrow had stain'd it,
> 'Twas frozen in all the pure light of its course,
> And but sleeps, till the sunshine of heaven has unchain'd it,
> To water that Eden, where first was its source.

. . . . . .

Weep not for her—in her springtime she flew
To that land where the wings of the soul are unfurled;
And now, like a star beyond evening's cold dew,
Looks radiantly down on the tears of the world.

As shown in another chapter, Moore's thought of sin was true and strongly expressed; his notion of holiness was also true, and his ideal very high:

The bird, let loose in eastern skies,
When hastening fondly home,
Ne'er stoops to earth her wing, nor flies
Where idle warblers roam.

. . . . . .

So grant me, God, from every care
And stain of passion free,
Aloft through Virtue's purer air
To hold my course to thee!

No sin to cloud—no lure to stay
My soul, as home she springs—
Thy sunshine on her joyful way,
Thy freedom in her wings.

What poet has sung a nobler aspiration in sweeter phrasing than the following?

As down in the sunless retreats of the ocean
Sweet flowers are springing no mortal can see,
So, deep in my soul the still prayer of devotion,
Unheard by the world, rises silent to Thee.

. . . . . .

As still to the star of its worship, though clouded,
The needle points faithfully o'er the dim sea,
So, dark as I roam, in this wintry world shrouded,
The hope of my spirit turns trembling to Thee.

What singer has sung a truer aspiration than this?

Oh, teach me to love Thee, to feel that Thou art,
Till, filled with the one sacred image, my heart
Shall all other passions disown—
Like some pure temple that shines apart
Reserved for Thy worship alone!

The following has an evangelical air about it that we can hardly look for in a Roman Catholic, least of all in one so very worldly as Moore is reputed to have been:

Since first Thy word awaked my heart,
Like new life dawning o'er me,
Whene'er I turn mine eyes, Thou art
All light and love before me.
Naught else I feel, or hear or see—
All bonds of earth I sever—
Thee, O God, and only Thee,
I live for now and ever.

To sum up the whole of this study and put its result into one sentence, we would say: Moore's thoughts of sin and holiness were in the main true, and his dreams of heaven were beautiful and inspiring; but his conceptions of God were grotesquely distorted, and he knew almost nothing of the Christ.

WHITTIER'S CREED

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me"

—JOHN xiv. 1

XII

Everybody knows that Whittier was a Quaker. While the Quakers do not accept the harsher tenets of Calvinism, yet, like many others who are not really Calvinists, they stress the sovereignty of God to such an extent that his fatherhood and his fatherly love and tenderness are almost forgotten. Whittier's protest against this view is strong and beautiful, yet tender and sweet:

O friends! with whom my feet have trod
The quiet aisles of prayer,
Glad witness to your zeal for God
And love of man I bear.

. . . . . .

But still my human hands are weak
To hold your iron creeds:
Against the words ye bid me speak
My heart within me pleads.

. . . . . .

I walk with bare hushed feet the ground
Ye tread with boldness shod;
I dare not fix with mete and bound
The love and power of God.

Ye praise his justice; even such
His pitying love I deem:
Ye seek a king; I fain would touch
The robe that hath no seam.

He does not ignore the fact of sin and the hatefulness of it; and he would not be misunderstood—he speaks clearly and honestly:

> More than your schoolmen teach, within
> Myself, alas! I know:
> Too dark ye cannot paint the sin,
> Too small the merit show.
>
> I bow my forehead to the dust,
> I veil mine eyes for shame,
> And urge, in trembling self-distrust,
> A prayer without a claim.
>
> I see the wrong that round me lies,
> I feel the guilt within;
> I hear, with groan and travail cries,
> The world confess its sin.

No stronger, clearer, truer statement of the fact and tendency and result of sin was ever uttered. The meaning of sin, its deep, dark guilt, its awful deservings, its revolting nature, are all fully and honestly recognized. Yet the "Eternal Goodness" sheds a light over the whole dark picture; the star of hope burns brightly:

> Yet in the maddening maze of things,
> And tossed by storm and flood,
> To one fixed stake my spirit clings:
> *I know that God is good.*

Then he sings an argument sweet and musical as it is strong and logical:

The wrong that pains my soul below
I dare not throne above:
I know not of his hate—I know
His goodness and his love.

He sings his faith in the providence of a God so tender in love, so positive in goodness:

I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

. . . . . .

And so beside the Silent Sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

This lyric of twenty-two quatrains is entitled "The Eternal Goodness," and is devoted to this protest against the false and this presentation of the true conception of God. Other of his poems speak the same protest and presentation. In "Snow-Bound" he says:

All hearts confess the saints elect
Who, twain in faith, in love agree,
And melt not in an acid sect
The Christian pearl of charity.

Thus he premises universal acceptance of the truth that a God of love will count as "elect" all who love. In "The Legend of St. Mark," he sings the same beautiful thought of God's love for us children of earth:

> Unheard no burdened heart's appeal
> Moans up to God's inclining ear;
> Unheeded by his tender eye,
> Falls to the earth no sufferer's tear.

While the love and tenderness of God are so strongly stressed, Whittier did not lean in the least toward that namby-pamby sentimentality which would argue that God is too good to permit a soul to be lost. In "The Answer," he states the truth of human responsibility very strongly and clearly:

> Though God be good and free be heaven,
> No force divine can love compel;
> And, though the song of sins forgiven
> May sound through lowest hell,
>
> The sweet persuasion of his voice
> Respects thy sanctity of will—
> He giveth day: thou hast thy choice
> To walk in darkness still.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> No word of doom may shut thee out,
> No wind of wrath may downward whirl,
> No swords of fire keep watch about
> The open gates of pearl;

A tenderer light than moon or sun,
  Than song of earth a sweeter hymn,
May shine and sound forever on,
  And thou be deaf and dim.

Forever round the Mercy seat
  The guiding lights of love shall burn;
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet
  Should lack the will to turn?

What if thine eye *refuse* to see,
  Thine ear of heaven's free welcome fail,
And thou a willing captive be,
  Thyself thy own dark jail?

Could any statement be clearer? could any argument be stronger? could thought of God be sweeter? The two closing quatrains are a solemn, awful warning, still saturated with his lovely conception of God:

O doom beyond the saddest guess,
  As the long years of God unroll
To make thy dreary selfishness
  The prison of a soul!

To doubt the love that fain would break
  The fetters from thy *self-bound* limb;
And dream that God can thee forsake
  As thou forsakest him!

This high and intensely true and beautiful conception of God comes to no man except as a revelation through Jesus Christ; hence it is to be expected that Whittier's notion of the Christ would

be equally elevated and lovely. This he sings in "Our Master," which Dr. Philip Schaff declared to be "the finest Christian ode produced in America." Has a finer one been produced in England or Germany or France or Italy? Its opening stanza is specially lofty in thought and feeling:

> Immortal Love, forever full,
> Forever flowing free,
> Forever shared, forever whole,
> A never-ebbing sea!

Here and there through the lyric are scattered stanzas of like wing—*e. g.*:

> O Lord and Master of us all!
> Whate'er our name or sign,
> We own thy sway, we hear thy call,
> We test our lives by thine!

The following are still loftier, stronger-winged, and richer:

> O Love! O Life! Our faith and sight
> Thy presence maketh one:
> As through transfigured clouds of white
> We trace the noonday sun.
>
> So to our mortal eyes subdued,
> Flesh-veiled but not concealed,
> We know in thee the fatherhood
> And heart of God revealed.

Christ was vastly more in Whittier's thought than a magnificent historic personage claiming the admiration of a wondering world. He was,

as he should be in the thought of every one of us, a real personal Saviour:

Alone, O Love ineffable!
Thy saving name is given:
To turn aside from thee is hell,
To walk with thee is heaven!

Not only did he think of Christ as a Saviour, but as a real living personality with whom he could come into conscious touch:

No fable old, nor mystic lore,
No dream of bards and seers,
No dead fact stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years;

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

The healing of his seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.

Whittier was very practical in his religion, and recognized that our relation to such a Christ involved very practical and positively Christlike service:

Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord,
What may thy service be?
Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,
But simply following thee.

We bring no ghastly holocaust,
  We pile no graven stone;
He serves thee best who lovest most
  His brothers and thine own.

Thy litanies, sweet offices
  Of love and gratitude;
Thy sacramental liturgies
  The joy of doing good.

. . . . . .

The heart must ring thy Christmas bells,
  Thy inward altars raise;
Its faith and hope thy canticles,
  And its obedience praise.

Whittier was very fond of this view of service to God and the Christ. In his poem entitled "Worship," he says:

O brother man! fold to thy heart thy brother;
  Where pity dwells the peace of God is there;
To worship rightly is to love each other,
  Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

In "Mary Garvin" he sings:

Christ's love rebukes no home love,
  Breaks no tie of kin apart;
Better heresy of doctrine
  Than heresy of heart.

Whittier did not at all believe in Calvinism, yet he taught a divine sovereignty, which respecting our "sanctity of will" claimed nevertheless a perfect submission to the divine—*claimed*, but did

not compel it. He sang his own heart and creed when he wrote:

> Strike, Thou the Master, we Thy keys
> The anthem of the destinies!
> The minor of thy loftier strain,
> Our hearts shall breathe, the old refrain:
> Thy will be done!

That such faith in God and the Christ should have filled Whittier's life with joyous hopefulness needs not to be proved. It could have no other effect. While his muse did not soar so high as did the muse of Tennyson, yet his strong, pure faith, his simple-heartedness, his transparent purity of life and thought gave to his simple utterances a strength and beauty that very few singers have ever reached.

THE RELIGION OF LONGFELLOW

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good"

—Acts x. 38

XIII

YEARS ago some one in England declared that Longfellow had not only written no line which dying he would wish to blot, but not one which living he had not a right to be proud of. The son of a noble father and pious mother, and surrounded from childhood by conditions favorable to the highest development of manhood, Longfellow grew up from a pure, good boy to a noble man with a white life, and, like Whittier, pre-eminently a Christian. His religious notions were, like his life, elevated, refined, correct, and utterly free from eccentricities. There seems to have been no purpose with him, save in his "Christus," to write what may be called "sacred poetry," though he named at least three of his poems "hymns"; yet the Christ spirit, which molded the beautiful life of the man, pervaded his verse throughout, giving it spirit and brightness. This Christ spirit sometimes found very clear, outspoken utterance, beautiful and inspiring.

In his "Hymn" for his brother's ordination, he sings thus of the Christ:

> Christ to the young man said: "Yet one thing more;
> If thou wouldst perfect be,
> Sell all thou hast and give it to the poor,
> And come and follow me!"

Within this temple Christ again, unseen,
Those sacred words hath said,
And his invisible hands to-day have been
Laid on a young man's head.

And evermore beside him on his way
The unseen Christ shall move,
That he may lean upon his arm and say,
"Dost Thou, dear Lord, approve?"

. . . . . .

O holy trust! O endless sense of rest!
Like the belovèd John
To lay his head upon the Saviour's breast,
And thus to journey on!

The conception of a personal, living Christ in conscious touch with the soul that trusts, sung in these lines, is as refreshing as it is true, as beautiful as it is inspiriting.

In his "Divine Tragedy," which as a work of art was not a great success, he nevertheless sings sweetly and truly the story of Jesus. In "Evangeline" he pictures exquisitely a Christly human life that had its seeking after the lost, its service of helpfulness, its years of loneliness, and at last its Gethsemane of utter disappointment and wonderful resignation. In these especially the Christ spirit is pervasive, felt rather than seen, intimated oftener than spoken.

Longfellow was not inclined to make public the sacred secrets of his soul; but there is told in "The Bridge" an experience which Methodists especially understand and appreciate:

How often, oh how often,
I had wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
O'er the ocean wild and wide!

For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.

But now it has fallen from me,
It is buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.

It is only the religion of Jesus that can roll off burdens too heavy for human hearts; and it is only when the life has been transfigured to the Christly that it is shadowed alone by "the sorrow of others." The doctrine is re-sung in "The Beleagured City":

Down the broad Vale of Tears afar
The spectral camp is fled;
Faith shineth as a morning star,
Our ghastly fears are dead.

His faith in the Christ-taught doctrine of the ministry of sorrow is beautifully told in "Resignation":

These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise,
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.

We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;
Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us sad, funereal tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps.

In the same sweet lyric he sings his strong, clear-eyed belief in immortality:

There is no death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life Elysian,
Whose portal we call Death.

She is not dead—the child of our affection—
But gone unto that school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
And Christ himself doth rule.

In "God's Acre" he sings this faith linked with his belief in the resurrection:

I like that ancient Saxon phrase, which calls
The burial ground God's Acre! It is just;
It consecrates each grave within its walls,
And breathes a benison o'er the sleeping dust.

. . . . . .

Into its furrows shall we all be cast,
In the sure faith that we shall rise again
At the great harvest, when the archangel's blast
Shall winnow, like a fan, the chaff and grain.

Then shall the good stand in immortal bloom,
In the fair gardens of that second birth;
And each bright blossom mingle its perfume
With that of flowers which never bloomed on earth.

His conception of the Christian life is told in "The Legend Beautiful":

> In his chamber all alone,
> Kneeling on the floor of stone,
> Prayed the Monk—
> . . . . . .
> Suddenly, as if it lightened,
> An unwonted splendor brightened—
> . . . . . .
> And he saw the Blessèd Vision
> Of our Lord, with light Elysian
> Like a vesture wrapt about him.

Naturally the Monk exulted in the Vision, wondering how it was that such superlative honor had come to him.

> Then amid his exaltation,
> Loud the convent bell
> . . . . . .
> Rang through court and corridor
> With persistent iteration
> He had never heard before.
> It was now the appointed hour
> When alike in shine or shower
> . . . . . .
> To the convent portals came
> All the blind and halt and lame,
> All the beggars of the street,
> For their daily dole of food
> Dealt them by the brotherhood;
> And their almoner was he
> Who upon his bended knee
> . . . . . .

Saw the Vision and the Splendor.

Whether to go and deal bread to the poor rabble, or to stay with the delightful Vision, was a perplexing problem for the Monk. He hesitated. If he went,

> Would the Vision there remain?
> Would the Vision come again?

Conscience whispered:

> "Do thy duty; that is best;
> Leave unto thy Lord the rest!"

He went, leaving the Splendor, and fed the hungry at the convent gate. When he returned to his cell he found that

> Through the long hour intervening
> It had waited his return,
> And he felt his bosom burn,
> Comprehending all the meaning,
> When the Blessèd Vision said,
> "Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!"

Like all real Christians, Longfellow was very optimistic. He believed in God profoundly, and in providence, in the Christ sweetly, and in heaven; and he believed in man, and in the large possibilities of humanity. His "Psalm of Life," too well and widely known to require quoting, is abundant and strong proof of his faith in humanity. In "The Builders" he sings the same faith:

All are architects of Fate,
  Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
  Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
  Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show
  Strengthens and supports the rest.

His finest expression of his optimism is possibly a stanza in "The Bells of San Blas," which was the last poem that he wrote:

O Bells of San Blas, in vain
Ye call back the Past again!
  The Past is deaf to our prayer;
Out of the shadows of night
The world rolls into light;
  It is daybreak everywhere.

In his "Nuremberg" he sang:

The nobility of labor—the long pedigree of toil;

and of Albrecht Dürer:

Emigravit is the inscription on the tombstone where he lies;
Dead he is not—but departed—for the artist never dies.

In "The Norman Baron" he re-sings his faith in the Christ:

Born and cradled in a manger!
King, like David, priest, like Aaron,
  Christ is born to set us free!

Thus throughout his lyrics and epics and dramas, these sparkling gems gleam with the fire of the Christ spirit which pervades his work, as it molded the man and guided his life.

HOLLAND'S
"BITTER-SWEET"

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" —HEB. xii. 6

XIV

Dr. J. G. Holland's finest work is his "Bitter-Sweet," a beautiful poem, dramatic in form, though evidently never intended for the stage, whose theme is the ministry of suffering. The scene is laid in a New England farmhouse; the time is "Winter's wild birthnight," the eve of Thanksgiving Day; the *dramatis personæ* are:

> A Puritan
> Who reads his Bible daily, loves his God,
> And lives serenely in the faith of Christ;

who is a widower, for

> His gentle wife, a dozen summers since,
> Passed from his faithful arms and went to heaven;
> And her best gift—a maiden sweetly named—
> His daughter Ruth;

and other children who are married, and grandchildren:

> John comes with Prudence and her little girls,
> And Peter matched with Patience brings his boys—
> Fair boys and girls with good old Scripture names—
> Joseph, Rebekah, Paul, and Samuel;
> And Grace, young Ruth's companion in the house,
> Till wrested from her last Thanksgiving Day,
> By the strong hand of Love, brings home her babe

And the tall poet David, at whose side
She went away. And seated in the midst,
Mary, a foster-daughter of the house,
Of alien blood—self-aliened many a year.

The plot of the drama involves the arguing of the question and the illustration of the doctrine; and the denouement presents an illustration of it strong, thrilling, and all-convincing. In the Prelude the doctrine is very strongly, even startlingly, stated:

Evil is only the slave of Good;
Sorrow, the servant of Joy;
And the soul is mad that refuses food
From the meanest in God's employ.

The fountain of Joy is fed with tears,
And love is lit by the breath of sighs
The deepest griefs and wildest fears
Have holiest ministries.

The first quatrain, as a matter of course, must not be understood in its most literal, unmodified sense: let us not forget that it is poetry. The second quatrain explains the first; then follows a beautiful illustration of the truth:

Strong grows the oak in the sweeping storm;
Safely the flower sleeps under the snow;
And the farmer's hearth is never warm
Till the cold wind starts to blow.

Ruth is skeptical, and she honestly confesses it:

I know
That care has iron crowns for many brows;

That Calvaries are everywhere, whereon
Virtue is crucified, and nails and spears
Draw guiltless blood; that sorrow sits and drinks
At sweetest hearts, till all their life is dry;
That gentle spirits on the rack of pain
Grow faint or fierce, and pray and curse by turns;
That Hell's temptations, clad in heavenly guise
And armed with might, lie evermore in wait
Along life's path, giving assault to all,
Fatal to most; that Death stalks through the earth,
Choosing his victims, sparing none at last;
That in each shadow of a pleasant tree
A grief sits sadly sobbing to its leaves.

. . . . . .

God forgive me! but I've thought
A thousand times that if I had his power,
Or he my love, we'd have a different world
From this we live in.

David, the poet and philosopher, meets Ruth's skepticism with argument and illustration. He urges:

God seeks for virtue, and that it may live
It must resist, and that which it resists
Must live. Believe me, God has other thought
Than restoration of our fallen race
To its primeval innocence and bliss.

He argues with strong reason that Christ

Was slain that we might be transformed—
Not into Adam's sweet similitude,
But the more glorious image of Himself,
A resolution of our destiny
As high transcending Eden's life and lot
As He surpasses Eden's fallen lord.

Pointing to the cider, he sings a striking parable:

Hearts like apples are hard and sour
Till crushed by Pain's resistless power,
And yield their juices rich and bland
To none but Sorrow's heavy hand.
The purest streams of human love
Flow naturally never,
But gush by pressure from above
With God's hand on the lever.

Pointing to the beef, he sings another:

Life evermore is fed by death
In earth and sea and sky;
And that a rose may breathe its breath
Something must die.
Earth is a sepulcher of flowers
Whose vitalizing mold
Through boundless transmutation towers
In green and gold.

. . . . . .

The milk-haired heifer's life must pass
That it may fill your own,
As passed the sweet life of the grass
She fed upon.

Pointing to the apples, he sang still another:

The native orchard's fairest trees,
Wild springing on the hill
Bear no such precious fruits as these,
And never will
Till ax and saw and pruning knife
Cut from them every bough,
And they receive a gentler life
Than crowns them now.

. . . . . .

Sorrow must crop each passion shoot,
And Pain each lust infernal,
Or human life can bear no fruit
To life eternal.
For angels wait on Providence,
And mark the sundered places,
To graft with gentlest instruments
The heavenly graces.

He closes his argument with these strong musical lines, as logical as they are melodious:

All common good has common price;
Exceeding good, exceeding;
Christ bought the keys of Paradise
By cruel bleeding;
And that every soul that wins a place
Upon its hills of pleasure
Must give its all and beg for grace
To fill the measure.

Were every hill a precious mine,
And golden all the mountains;
Were all the rivers fed with wine
By tireless fountains;
Life would be ravished of its zest,
And shorn of its ambition,
And sink into the dreamless rest
Of inanition.
Up the broad stairs that Value rears
Stand motives beckoning earthward
To summon men to nobler spheres,
And lead them worthward.

The plot involves a sad domestic problem

which finds in the denouement a solution sweet and pathetic that confirms the argument resistlessly. The drama closes with a death scene so beautiful that one asks:

> And this is death! Think you that raptured soul
> Now walking humbly in the golden streets,
> Bearing the precious burden of a love
> Too great for utterance, or with hushed heart
> Drinking the music of the ransomed throng,
> Counts death an evil?

Ruth, midway in the argument, saw the force of David's logic and was convinced, and confessed it very sweetly:

> Thank God for light!
> These truths are slowly dawning on my soul—
> . . . . . .
> Dear Lord! what visions crowd before my eyes—
> Visions drawn forth from memory's mysteries
> By the sweet shining of these holy lights!
> I see a girl, once lightest in the dance,
> And maddest with the gayety of life,
> Grow pale and pulseless, wasting day by day—
> . . . . . .
> A sweet smile sits upon her angel face,
> And peace, with downy bosom, nestles close—
> Closer still,
> As on white wings the outward-going soul
> Flies to a home it never would have sought,
> Had a great evil failed to point the way.
> I see a youth whom God has crowned with power
> And cursed with poverty. With bravest heart

He struggles with his lot, through toilsome
years—
Kept to his task by daily want of bread,
And kept to virtue by his daily task—
Till gaining manhood in the manly strife,
The fire that fills him smitten from a flint,
The strength that arms him wrested from a fiend:
He stands, at last, a master of himself,
And in that grace a master of his kind.

. . . . . .

Like the hand
Of a strong angel on the shoulder laid
Touching the secrets of the spirit's wings.
My heart grows brave. I'm ready now to work—
To work with God, and suffer with his Christ.

The English language has voiced few hymns truer, stronger, and sweeter than the Thanksgiving Hymn they sang that night, the first stanza of which runs thus:

For Summer's bloom and Autumn's blight,
For bending wheat and blasting maize,
For health and sickness, Lord of light,
And Lord of darkness, hear our praise!

"THE MARBLE PROPHECY"

"For we wrestle" —Eph. vi. 12

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" —Rom. vii. 24

XV

An old Greek myth, recited by Virgil in his "Æneid," tells of Laocoön, an old priest, who, while sacrificing assisted by his two sons, on the sea beach, near Troy, was seized, with his sons, and crushed to death by two gigantic sea serpents, which had glided unobserved from the water. In the Vatican at Rome there is a sculptured group, recovered from the ruins of the Palace of Titus, which pictures with startling realness this fatal conflict of Laocoön and his sons with the twin serpents at Troy. It was a favorite theme with Greek and Roman artists and poets. It so vividly expressed a universal spiritual experience that every soul of humankind readily understood its mystic meaning. Our American poet, Dr. J. G. Holland, when in the Vatican Museum, came face to face with this Rhodian group of the Laocoön, and was inspired to sing what he aptly calls "The Marble Prophecy"; and thus he sang it:

Laocoön! thou great embodiment
Of human life and human history!
Thou record of the past, thou prophecy
Of the sad future, thou majestic voice,
Pealing along the ages from old time!
Thou wail of agonized humanity!

There lives no thought in marble like to thee!
Thou hast no kindred in the Vatican,
But standest separate among the dreams
Of old mythologies—alone—alone!
The beautiful Apollo at thy side
Is but a marble dream: and dreams are all
The gods and goddesses and fauns and fates
That populate these wondrous halls; but thou,
Standing among them, liftest up thyself
In majesty of meaning, till they sink
Far from thy sight, no more significant
Than the poor toys of children: for thou art
A voice from out the world's experience,
Speaking of all the generations past
To all the generations yet to come
Of the long struggle, the sublime despair,
The wild and weary agony of man.
Aye—Adam and his offspring in the toils
Of the twin serpents, Sin and Suffering,
Thou dost impersonate; and as I gaze
Upon the twining monsters that infold
In unrelaxing, unrelenting coils
Thy awful energies, and plant their fangs
Deep in thy quivering flesh, while still thy might
In fierce convulsion foils the fateful wrench
That would destroy thee, I am overwhelmed
With a strange sympathy of kindred pain,
And see through gathering tears the tragedy,
The curse and conflict of a ruined race.

This fact of human history and experience, which had come moaning down more than forty centuries, which had been so vividly voiced in art and poetry, which had been written in every

nation's annals, which had been taught in philosophy and carved in marble, finds inspired expression strong and simple in the New Testament. Paul, looking back to the time when he, like Laocoön, fought this fearful battle, wrote to the Romans: "When we were in the flesh"—*i. e.,* when we were unregenerate—"the sinful passions . . . wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Revoicing a famous dictum of Plato, he continues: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would that I do not; but what I hate that I do. . . . I see a law"—*i. e.,* a force—"in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" To the Ephesians he wrote: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness." Paul could hardly have used other language had he been sitting, as he wrote those words to the Romans, at the very foot of the Rhodian Laocoön drawing his inspiration and suggestion from it. He wrote of that struggle, which has come to every man and woman that ever lived, not excepting even the incarnate Son of God—that gigantic and awful struggle of the Godlike and aspiring human soul against

sin, whose effort and purpose are to drag down and befoul and utterly ruin.

Sin is a veritable Proteus, now coming to the attack in the form of selfishness cold and hard and grasping, now as some sudden strong passion, now as a gross growing habit that day by day wraps serpent-like fold on fold about the soul getting ready for the final fatal crush, and now as a flaming temper leaping upon the soul with lightning quickness and transfixing it with the stare of its blazing eyes. It sometimes comes up to us in the garb of beauty, or in the form of some lovely virtue, "*deceiving* the very elect" and luring to ruin the purest-minded among us. Whatever its form or appearance, it is the same "old serpent," Sin, accompanied by its twin brother, Suffering, which have battled with the race for at least six thousand years. In the dewy morning of the world it glided into Eden and ruined man's home, and so it is,

> Some flow'rets of Eden we still inherit,
> But the trail of the Serpent is over them all.

It has followed the sons of Adam to every shore of earth and left its slime on the loveliest, loftiest of men and women. It loves a shining mark. Its delight is to befoul the purest, mar the most beautiful, and drag down the loftiest. It would, if it could, climb to the very throne of

all worlds and wrap the Creator himself in the tragedy of Laocoön.

Dr. Holland says of the Rhodian Laocoön that inspired his song, and of the legend which the marble tells:

> Be sure it was no fable that inspired
> So grand an utterance. Perchance some leaf
> From the Hebrew record had conveyed
> The knowledge of the genesis of sin
> And woe.

Thousands of years before the Rhodian Laocoön was carved, or Paul wrote, or Holland sang, it was told on earth that God's Son in human form should some day meet the serpent of Eden's ruin in mortal conflict and should bruise his head, and be bruised himself. Old Egypt heard the glad story, and we read on her ruined temple walls, in crude symbolic picturing, the story of Horus crushing the head of the serpent of evil. Persia of old heard the story beautiful, and, translating it into her own speech, tells of a war between Mithras, the savior, and Ahriman, the god of sin. Greece heard the story, and retold it in two of her poetic legends: one was of Hercules slaying the Hydra of Lake Loerna, and the other told of Apollo, the sun god, slaying the dreadful Python. Thus over the whole world the story went; and men everywhere learned that only a God could overcome the serpent of sin; and

yet so many thousands to-day have not learned the story, though they have heard it so often. Will not Greeks and Romans, Persians and Egyptians, out of the dead centuries of that distant pagan age, rise up on that great Judgment Day and condemn the unfaith in Christ and the insane folly of these thousands born in the glorious evening of the nineteenth century or early morning of the twentieth?

Let us stress "the old, old story" of a Christ who is able to save, and as willing as he is able. It is an *old* story indeed. It was whispered in Eden, and it has been many times retold, often in distorted form it is true. It has been sung, often in mysterious measures, by the bards of all lands. It has been cut in stone by men who built Babylon and piled the Pyramids and carved the marvelous statuary of Greece. But nowhere has it been told so simply, so strongly, and so sweetly as in the New Testament.

EPICS
OF JESUS

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" —Rev. xxii. 13

XVI[1]

An epic is a song with a hero for its theme. We are all hero worshipers; hence the epic is universally popular. For nearly twenty centuries Jesus has stood unparalleled in greatness, receiving from millions a worship transcending the loftiest "hero worship" ever paid to Ulysses or Æneas. The keen-witted, infidelic Rénan is led to say:

> Whatever may be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will grow young without ceasing; his legend will call forth tears without end; his sufferings will melt the noblest heart; all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus.

The great heart of humanity has demanded for him who is the grandest of all heroes the sublimest of all epics. For centuries past the great singers, recognizing this demand, have been striving to tune their lyres to melodies sublime enough to meet it. All have failed; the ideal epic of Jesus remains to be written.

Of those who have, each in his own way, and from his own one-sided point of view, attempted

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[1]This chapter appeared in the *Quarterly Review* of the M. E. Church, South, January, 1892.

it, only Dante and Tasso, Milton and Pollok, Bickersteth and Arnold, are worthy of mention.

Had Tasso's "Jerusalem Delivered" been written in the nineteenth century, instead of the sixteenth, it could no more be mentioned in this connection than can Longfellow's "Divine Tragedy" or Pope's "Messiah"; but as chivalry was the only expression of the world's Christ-love left to the dark ages, out of which Tasso sang, and as Christian theology had degenerated into a confused and contemptible mixture of Roman paganism, Grecian philosophy, and New Testament doctrines, it is evident that Tasso, the blind devotee of an unknown Christ, intended his song to be an epic of Christianity on its human side—in a sense an epic of Christ. It serves as an illustrious example of the utter inability of mediæval Christianity to produce anything worthy of the name of a Christian ode, much less a Christian epic. Aping Virgil introducing his "Æneid," Tasso begins:

> I sing the pious arms and Chief, who freed
> The Sepulcher of Christ from thrall profane.

His hero then is not the Christ really, but Duke Godfrey:

> Godfrey burns to wrest
> From hand profane the consecrated town,
> And, heaven affecting, in what slight request

> He holds the meaner joys of earth—renown,
> Treasure, and purple power, and glory's meteor crown.

Dante, more learned and with broader mental sweep than Tasso, out of the same mediæval gloom, three centuries earlier, sang his "Divina Comedia," which he by no means meant to be a comedy in the modern sense; although its absurdity would be comic if it did not wear such an air of profound earnestness. Dante wrote from the theological side of Christianity, as Tasso from the human or common life side; or, to be more exact, Dante dealt with Christian mythology and Tasso with Christian chivalry. Neither has touched the great heart of humanity, and neither has in any true sense written an epic of Jesus.

Milton's twin songs, "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," constitute the first real Christian epic ever written. That Milton did not plan to write an epic of Jesus, but rather of humanity, is evident from the fact that "Paradise Lost" was written before he thought of writing its companion; and "Paradise Regained" closes with the temptation scene, which Milton seems to have considered the crowning act of Messianic conquest, the complete assurance of a redeemed humanity; although it occurs at the very opening of the wonderful drama, and should fall in the first or second canto of an epic of Jesus.

Nor did he end his work in sheer despair of accomplishing the task he had planned; for he was so well pleased with his work that he insisted on ranking it with "Paradise Lost," and was displeased that many of his readers preferred the earlier poem.

Milton's twin songs are intensely theological. He sings

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into our world and all our woe.

He teaches man's moral agency, declaring that God

> Made him just and right,
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

He sings of redemption, of

> Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
> By one man's firm obedience fully tried
> Through all temptation, and the tempter foiled
> In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
> And Eden raised in the waste wilderness.

He sings of God—

> Immutable, immortal, infinite,
> Eternal King, Author of all being,
> Fountain of Light!

And of the

> Begotten Son, divine similitude,
> In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud
> Made visible, the Almighty Father shines.

He sings of

> Angels, progeny of light,
> Thrones, dominations, princedoms,
> Virtues, powers—

both fallen and unfallen—and of heaven, the beautiful; and of hell, those

> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell.

Milton, though reared a Calvinist, had risen above the stern and awful hyper-Calvinism of his day. He makes God say of the fallen angels:

> They therefore, as to right belonged,
> So were created; nor can justly accuse
> Their Maker or their making or their fate,
> As if predestination overruled
> Their will disposed by absolute decree
> Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
> Their own revolt—not I; if I foreknew,
> Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
> Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.

Nevertheless his conception of God is intensely Calvinistic. Divine sovereignty was, in his view, so autocratic, or rather despotic, that

> He
> Who now is Sovereign can dispose and bid
> What shall be right.

Although these words occur in a speech made by Satan, yet they express the current belief of Milton's day; and if he had not believed it, he would certainly have expressed his dissent.

The one preëminent feature of Milton's songs is grandeur; but it is cold and stately, generally dreadful—never softened. His very efforts at the beautiful are cold, rigidly elegant—never warm, tender. He speaks of "amarant," not *amaranth.*

> The spirits elect
> Bind their resplendent locks inwreathed with beams:
> The bright
> Pavement, that like a sea of jasper shone,
> Impurpled with celestial roses smiled.

Shining pavement of jasper and *purple roses*—what regal, elegant, stately beauty! yet without a touch of tenderness or a hint of sweetness; a *smile,* but cold and glistening.

This utter want of tenderness, the result of the cold, stern theology of his day—that which made him a Puritan much more than a Christian; that which taught him to hate sin with a hatred itself akin to sin, but could not teach him to love the sinner; that which glorified the justice of God and forgot his mercy; that which painted in regal magnificence the Divine King, and could not say "Our Father, who art in heaven"—that was the one fatal defect in this poet, who would sing of Jesus. If he had tried to write an epic of Jesus instead of an epic of redeemed humanity, he would have failed most signally. Possibly he knew this. His picture of Christ [1] makes him a

[1] See "Paradise Lost," Book III.

veritable Mars, as utterly unlike the Christ of the Gospels as the Grecian war god is unlike the wrestler in Gethsemane, or the guest of the Bethany home:

> Thou that day
> Thy Father's dreadful thunder didst not spare,
> Nor stop thy flaming chariot wheels, that shook
> Heaven's everlasting frame, while o'er the necks
> Thou drovest of warring angels disarrayed.
> Back from pursuit thy powers, with loud acclaim,
> Thee only extolled, Son of thy Father's might
> To execute fierce vengeance on his foes.

The common people of Milton's day were not a reading people; hence he made no effort to write for any but the learned. Therefore we find his songs obscure with learned allusions, and burdened with similes and metaphors mythologic and scientific. This gives his verse an air of pedantry which renders harsh and stiff what might otherwise be somewhat tender. It must be remembered, also, that he wrote at a time when the English language was far less voluminous and flexible than now; and no writer could shade his word-pictures and give to his thoughts a dress in such harmony with the nature of the thought as the poet of to-day may do. All of these things conspire to rob Milton's twin songs of the tender sweetness and melting melody indispensable to the ideal epic of Jesus.

Of Pollok's "Course of Time" but little need

be said. Like the songs of Milton, it is rather an epic of humanity than aught else. It deals with Christ and Christianity only as these are inseparably intertwined with human origin, life, and destiny. With less of grandeur and more adaptability to the common people than Milton's songs, it deals largely with the same or cognate matters. It is better arranged, but not so well expressed, often descending to the puerile. It talks somewhat of our Christ, but fails to be a real epic of Jesus.

In September, 1866, there appeared in England —and five years later in America—an extended epic from the pen of Rev. Edward Henry Bickersteth, entitled "Yesterday, To-day, and Forever." It sings of heaven and hell, time and eternity, of sin and redemption, of Christ and his Church, of the millennium and the judgment. It is an epic of Time, an epic of God, an epic of Man, but more than all an epic of Jesus. It has little of Milton's grandeur, but has a wealth of tender sweetness and delicate beauty of which Milton never dreamed. His very efforts at grandeur are so softened that strength is sacrificed to tenderness—it is but beauty slightly sublimated. Witness the following:

> My soul
> Was lit up with a clearer, purer light,
> The daybreak of a near eternity,

Which cast its penetrating beams across
The isthmus of my life, and fringed with gold
The mists of childhood, and revealed beyond
The outline of the everlasting hills.

Was there ever painted a sweeter picture of something great than this?

Once, when night was listening for the dawn,
Aloof upon the brow of Olivet
I gazed on sleeping Salem. In the east
Flashed a faint streak of pearl: the distant hills
Slumbered in the shadow and the vales in mist.

His very conception of a conquering Christ is softened with an ever-abiding thought of a suffering Christ:

On Olivet
The weary Saviour rested and forecast
The anguish coming on Jerusalem,
The birth-pangs of evangel life, nor left
That mountain's brow, nor limited the range
Of his prophetic vision, till he spake
Of his great advent in the clouds of heaven.

Milton, with his Calvinistic Puritanism, could never have written anything like this:

It was not only grace we saw, but grace
That failed not in a world of selfishness;
Nor only light, but light in poisonous air
Miraculously burning, self-sustained;
Nor faith alone, but faith emptying itself,
Itself to strengthen in another's might;
Self-limited omnipotence, that deigned,
Weak even as man is weak, to lean on God.

. . . . . .

Emmanuel tabernacled among men
To solace and sustain his orphan Church,
To heal the bleeding heart of penitence,
To cheer the downcast wayfarers to stand
Suddenly as a spirit, but every man
Among his brethren, and imbreathe on them
The benediction of his peace and power,
To transform human fear to heavenly faith,
To conquer doubt by love; a second time
To teach his chosen fishermen to cast
The dragnet of the kingdom, to reveal
Himself unto his own in Galilee.

Here again we have strength sacrificed to sweetness; and Milton would have undoubtedly sacrificed sweetness to strength: the writer of the ideal epic of Jesus must do neither. Tennyson in his "In Memoriam" does neither; and had he written an epic of Jesus as exhaustively and carefully as he wrote "In Memoriam," I believe the world would have recognized in it the longed-for ideal, unless it had failed to reach the height of grandeur required, which is quite possible; for strength is not always grandeur, and Tennyson is not a theologian.

Just ten years ago there appeared in England —and a little later in America—an epic of Jesus, entitled "The Light of the World," written by Sir Edwin Arnold, who had won his fame a dozen years earlier by his epic of Buddha, entitled "The Light of Asia." Here we have what at-

tempts to be simply and only an epic of Jesus—nothing more, nothing less. Milton aimed at something more, Pollok at something a little else, Bickersteth at that and something more; but Arnold only at that. He has succeeded in so far that he has written a veritable epic of Jesus, but his work lacks much of the *ideal* epic of Jesus.

The one peculiar feature of Sir Edwin's work, and its greatest charm, is naturalness—the sweet simplicity of naturalness. Witness the following:

> So many hillsides crowned with rugged rocks!
> So many simple shepherds keeping flocks,
> In many moonlit fields! but only they—
> So lone, so long ago, so far away—
> On that one winter's night at Bethlehem,
> To have white angels singing lauds for them!

Here we have but one word, "lauds," that any child might not comprehend—all so simple, so natural, and yet beautiful. His verse has the charm of rhyme and rhythm, alliteration and melody. What can be sweeter than this?

> Meek and sweet in the sun he stands,
> Drinking the cool of his Syrian skies,
> Lifting to heaven toil-wearied hands,
> Seeing his Father with those pure eyes.
> Gazing from trestle and bench and saw
> To the kingdom kept for his rule above;
> O Jesus, Lord, we see with awe!
> O Mary's Son, we look with love!

His theology, though not so profound, so grand in its sweep, so philosophic as Milton's, and in some respects very faulty, is yet, in its conception of God, vastly truer, lacking every tinge of the Calvinistic harshness of the seventeenth century theology:

> God's love runneth faster than our feet,
> To meet us stealing back to him and peace,
> And kisses dumb our shame—nay, and puts on
> The best robe, bidding angels bring it forth,
> While heaven makes festival.

The Christ he paints is all tenderness, divine tenderness; strong, yet tenderer than strong:

> This Godlike One—
> This spotless, stainless, sinless, blameless Christ—
> Whom none did once convince of one small swerve
> From perfectness; nor ever shall! So strong
> The elements obey him; so divine
> The devils worshiped; so with virtue charged
> The touch of him was health; so masterful
> The dead came back upon his call; so mild
> The little children clustered at his knee,
> And nestled trustful locks on that kind breast
> Which leans to-day on God's.

The following is his description of Jesus' personal appearance:

> One
> Of a commanding stature—beautiful—
> Bearing such countenance as whoso gazed
> Must love or fear. Wine-color shone his hair,

Glittering and waved, an aureole folded down,
Its long rays lighted locks which fell and flowed
Fair parted from the midle of his head,
After the manner of the Nazarites.
Of dignity surpassing, pure and pale
As lightning leaping sudden from the sky,
As the Greek's marble, but flushed frequently
With the bright blood of manhood. Nose and mouth
Faultless for grace, and full and soft the beard,
Forked, the hazel color of his hair;
The great eyes blue and radiant, mild as sky;
Even and clear his forehead; and the face
Of springtime after rain, yet terrible
When he rebuked. In admonition calm;
In tender hours each word like music's soul
Heard past the sound! Not ofttimes seen to smile,
More oft to weep; yet of a lofty cheer
Commonly—yea, of playful raillery
And swift wit, softened with sweet gravity.
Straight standing like a palm tree; hands and limbs
So molded that the noblest copy of them
Among the sons of men fairest and first.

The naturalness of Sir Edwin's song is greatly enhanced by a positive orientalism very marked throughout the whole poem. He talks of

The high-capped Median bringing stallions in,
The Indian traders with the spice and silk,
The negro men from Cush and Elamites,
The Red Sea sailors; and from the shores of Nile
The blue-gowned, swart Egyptian—
. . . . . frequent feet
Of Tyrian traders and dark desert men

> Rocking upon their camels, with wild eyes
> Glittering like lance points; and Sidonians,
> Syrians and Greeks and Jews—a motley crowd.

He sings, now and then, his vague, wild Indian philosophy:

> *Om Amitaya!* O
> The Immeasurable! What word but doeth wrong,
> Clothing the Eternal in the forms of now?

Notwithstanding all of this naturalness and beauty, all of this tenderness, this truest conception of God, and this presentation of the human Jesus superior to any ever before drawn by poet, yet his work lacks much of the ideal epic of Jesus. Its defects are grave and numerous. The plot is very defective, many important events being entirely overlooked, and unimportant and often imaginary scenes largely elaborated. History and biography are very rudely handled. For instance, he makes Mary of Magdala identical with Mary of Bethany, and both with the fallen one who came to Jesus in the house of Simon of Galilee. His orientalism, which is so charming, would be more so were it not Indian orientalism instead of Syrian, which the setting of the Christ history demands. The most glaring defect, however, is his manifest and disappointing want of grandeur. The Jesus he draws in "The Light of the World" is only about as much greater than the Gautama of his "Light of

Asia" as the earth is larger than Asia. Now our Christ is just as tender, and just as human, and just as loving and lovable, sweet and beautiful as Sir Edwin paints him, but he is also as grand as God, as much greater than Buddha as the universe is greater than Asia. Calvary and Gethsemane, Hermon and Olivet were not pretty garden scenes, lapped with lullaby breezes and odorous with roses; but they were tremendous in their sweep, reaching to the stars, touching the throne of Omnipotence, enlisting the universe, and echoing into the ages of eternity. Sir Edwin seems to have no sort of a conception of this, but deals with all of them as if they were merely exquisite passages in the history of a man whose life and character were a little too angelic and wonderful to be classed as human. I do not suppose that Sir Edwin doubts the divinity of Jesus, but he has never learned what that divinity means. An epic of Jesus with the element of redemption left out is as defective as would be the play of *Hamlet* with Hamlet's part eliminated. Sir Edwin has given us a picture of a gentle, loving, teaching, healing, suffering, dying, and rising Jesus; but utterly ignores the fact that he is also a world-redeeming Jesus. Milton made so much of the divine Christ that he lost sight of the human; Sir Edwin, on the other hand, makes so much of the human that he loses sight of the divine.

The English language has now attained a richness and fullness which enables it to express all the delicate shades of thought and feeling, and with all degrees of intensity. Such was never attained by any tongue of antiquity, and is unknown to any other dialect of to-day. With more simplicity than the old Hebrew, more strength than the Latin of Cæsar and Cicero, more melody than classic Greek, and more volume than all put together, it has never been equaled and will never be surpassed. The language, then, is ready to word the ideal epic of Jesus. Nineteenth century research has turned a strong light on the history and chronology, philology and bibliography of the New Testament; and on the topography and geography, ethnology and folklore of the land of Jesus; and the world to-day knows more about the wonderful "Son of Man" than ever before, and possibly nearly as much as will be known until the light of eternity falls on the events of time. Now, if some poet would arise, with the grandeur of Milton, the elegance of Tennyson, the tenderness of Bickersteth, the naturalness of Sir Edwin Arnold, and the learning of a Geikie, he might write an epic of Jesus which would delight earth's millions a thousand years to come.

Almost every great epic in the English language bears on its face a painful confession of weakness in its author. Milton did not dare to

attempt rhyme, and knew nothing of alliteration; Bickersteth attempts alliteration now and then, but shuns the rhyme, although in his lyrics and lesser epics he uses it with marked success; Arnold uses rhyme to some extent, and alliteration more freely; but all seemed to fear that it might so trammel them that their verse would be constrained and weak. For the very same reason hundreds of others write only in prose. A first-class poet is one who is able to write easy, smooth, elegant, and strong verse, adorned with rhyme as well as rhythm, alliteration as well as figures, and yet resort to as few inversions as elegance or force requires, and shun as sin everything known as poetic license. *The less inversion the more naturalness, and the less license the more elegance,* should be his motto. The ideal epic of Jesus must come to us grand in thought, rich in figure, tender in spirit, true as the Gospels in its narrative, and clothed in the choicest English, with rhyme and rhythm and alliteration and every other charm known to poetry.

Who will write it, and when? It will be written, though we who live to-day may never read it.

THE END.

Date Due